MARVEL MASTERWORKS®

THE FANTASTIC FOUR®

VOLUME 13

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP™
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
134
MAY
02462
THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
FANTASTIC FOUR®
STOP HIM! HE'S GOT MY WIFE-- MY CHILD!
BUT-- IF WE MAKE HIM LET GO OF THEM--
--THEY'LL FALL TO THEIR DEATHS!!
THE DRAGON MAN STALKS THE SKIES!

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Nos. 129-141

ROY THOMAS, GERRY CONWAY & JOHN BUSCEMA

MARVEL

MARVEL MASTERWORKS

PRESENTS

THE Fantastic FOUR

VOLUME 13

COLLECTING

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Nos. 129-141

ROY THOMAS • GERRY CONWAY

JOHN BUSCEMA

Collection Editor
Cory Sedlmeier
Book Design
Nickel DesignWorks
SVP of Publishing Sales & Circulation
David Gabriel
SVP of Brand Planning & Communication
Michael Pasciullo
Digital Manager/Production
Tim Smith 3
Digital Production
Kou Chen
Editor in Chief
Axel Alonso
Chief Creative Officer
Joe Quesada
Publisher
Dan Buckley
Executive Producer
Alan Fine

© 2017 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters featured in this issue and the distinctive names and likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of Marvel Characters, Inc. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. WWW.MARVEL.COM

MARVEL MASTERWORKS
CREDITS

THE
FANTASTIC FOUR
NOS. 129-141

Writers: Roy Thomas (Nos. 129-133, 136, 137)
Gerry Conway (Nos. 133-141)

Pencilers: John Buscema (Nos. 129, 130, 132, 134-141)
Ross Andru (No. 131)
Ramona Fradon (No. 133)

Inker: Joe Sinnott

Letterers: Art Simek (Nos. 129, 130, 134-137)
John Costanza (Nos. 131-133, 138-141)

Editor: Roy Thomas

Color & Art Reconstruction: Wil Glass & All Thumbs Creative

Special Thanks: Ralph Macchio

MARVEL MASTERWORKS
CONTENTS

Introduction by Roy Thomas

"Foreword Into the Past" by Gerry Conway

The Fantastic Four #129, December 1972
"The Frightful Four--Plus One!"

The Fantastic Four #130, January 1973
"Battleground: The Baxter Building!"

The Fantastic Four #131, February 1973
"Revolt in Paradise!"

The Fantastic Four #132, March 1973
"Omega! The Ultimate Enemy!"

The Fantastic Four #133, April 1973
"Thundra at Dawn!"

The Fantastic Four #134, May 1973
"A Dragon Stalks the Skies!"

The Fantastic Four #135, June 1973
"The Eternity Machine"

The Fantastic Four #136, July 1973
"Rock Around the Cosmos!"

The Fantastic Four #137, August 1973
"Rumble on Planet 3"

The Fantastic Four #138, September 1973
"Madness is…the Miracle Man!"

The Fantastic Four #139, October 1973
"Target: Tomorrow!"

The Fantastic Four #140, November 1973
"Annihilus Revealed!"

The Fantastic Four #141, December 1973
"The End of the Fantastic Four!"

INTRODUCTION
BY ROY THOMAS

While, from my viewpoint as both writer and editor, John Buscema's art on the subterranean war between Mole Man and Tyrannus in #127-128 (reprinted last volume) represents the absolute apex of his penciling on "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine," he continued to turn out great *Fantastic Four* art.

Although I'd been overjoyed to take over the scripting of my sentimental-favorite Marvel title with #126 when Stan had become president and publisher, I knew I'd find it hard to keep writing that series as long as I had, say, *The Avengers*, due to my increased activities as Marvel's new editor-in-chief.

But before we get to the actual stories: I'm not sure whether it was Stan or yours truly who came up with the idea to change the spelling/wording on the cover line, so that with #129 *F.F.* proudly began proclaiming itself "The World's Greatest Comix Magazine!" Half the time when I ponder that question, I think it was my own hare-brained idea. The rest of the time, I remember it as a brilliant brainchild of Stan's that didn't quite pan out.

The rationale for the change, of course, was the growing popularity of "underground comix" by Crumb, Shelton, et al., which had perhaps gotten at least a part of their original impetus from the fact that the other media were taking comic books just a wee bit more seriously in the past few years, since the rise of Marvel. For a time, it seemed to Stan and me that the spelling "comix" might very well be destined to supplant "comics." And we thought that might be a good thing, after all those complaints from self-appointed critics over the years that "comics [= comic books] aren't really funny," to lose the original spelling and its kiddie connotations. We dared hope that together we and the undergrounders might pioneer this new *word:* "comix."

It didn't take, of course—at least not with regard to mainstream comics like Marvel, DC, et al.—and with #131 Stan decided that the original heading would be restored to the *F.F.* covers. Thus, Marvel's only real experiment with anything resembling underground "comix" would come a bit later, when Stan and cartoonist Denis Kitchen would get together to launch the short-lived magazine *Comix Book*.

Anway: for #129 I brought back the Frightful Four—with a new co-ed comely, while one-time member Medusa aided the heroes. The Wizard, Sandman, and the Trapster were accompanied by a seven-foot stunner called Thundra. She wore a stylized bandolier, as did a few of the more strident members of that era's feminist pioneers; it helped set her apart from all those *other* seven-foot super-heroines/villainesses out there. She soon became fairly popular in the Marvel Universe.

Still, I felt the F.F. title could use a bit of shaking up, so I decided [SPOILER NOTE!] to have Sue leave the team and take son Franklin with her. In an earlier era, her justification for doing so would probably have been because Reed's actions had endangered the life of their child, and

I always felt that was part of her (unstated and perhaps unrealized) motive. However, her overt reason was her feeling that, by his reverting to protective male instincts in the midst of battle, her husband has dissed her, treating her only as the "mother of my child"—so she walked. I'll confess, I didn't feel as much sympathy for such a motive as some feminists reading the issue might've had…but a scripter can't only write characters with whose motivations he/she fully agrees, right? At any rate, I felt the situation set up possibilities for the near future…and paved the way for Medusa to soon join the team.

As a minor bonus, it was nice to get Jim Steranko to pencil the issue's cover. His appearances at Marvel were so rare by now that I was glad to utilize his talents whenever he made himself available.

F.F. #131 spotlighted, unknowingly, a preview of coming attractions, as comics veteran Ross Andru was tapped to relieve John B. for an issue. While a huge fan of Ross, whose work I felt was underrated by fans who were perhaps prejudiced by all those off-the-wall *Wonder Woman* stories he'd illustrated for DC, I was under no illusion that he was as good a fit for the F.F. as Buscema, let alone the departed Kirby…but when John had other things on his plate that month, I happily tossed Ross into the breach. (I'm sure that Ross, who never seemed to enjoy doing comics, just sighed: "Another super hero group? Like, I didn't serve my sentence on *Metal Men*?") All the same, he did a creditable job on a story that reintroduced Quicksilver and the Inhumans to the rotating cast of characters.

John B. was back in #132 for the big clash with Omega—and to usher Medusa formally into the F.F. I also got Stan's permission to do something else I thought might be good for Marvel's flagship title, which hadn't been quite as popular since Kirby had exited a couple of years earlier, after an initial spike in sales during the handful of Romita-penciled issues. Like many other fans and pros, I'd long felt the F.F.'s cookie-cutter uniforms were holding them back so, as I'd done earlier with the X-Men, I varied their coloring if not their details. I put Johnny Storm in red and yellow, the colors of the original Human Torch, while Medusa wore purple and black. Reed and the hardly-garbed Thing kept their old looks.

When the next issue rolled around, John Buscema was again needed elsewhere, so I tried a wild card. I got hold of the phone number of Ramona Fradon, who'd earlier drawn Aquaman and Metamorpho (whom she'd co-created) for DC. I'd always felt she'd make a good addition to Marvel, but she'd basically retired from comics a decade earlier to raise her children. She wasn't wild about having to work from my written synopsis instead of a full script, but she did it—and I was pleased with her work on *F.F.* #133, even if it was a bit "cartoonier" than John's or even Ross' work. I'd had fun working in the leftover Unisphere from the 1964-65 New York World's Fair (which I'd managed to attend), so I was disappointed when my new editorial duties forced me to relinquish the actual scripting to Gerry Conway.

Gerry, who was only 20 or so, was a mild phenomenon in the field at the time, having already sold a science-fiction novel or two; after serving a brief apprenticeship on DC's "mystery" titles, he'd quickly become one of Marvel's most important writers and was already scripting *The*

Amazing Spider-Man, the company's best-selling title since the early Romita days. We'd also become good friends, but that didn't influence my selection.

With #134, John B. was back—and I tapped Gerry as the mag's writer, at least for a couple of issues. For the most part, I'll let him tell you about his first few F.F. tales. I suspect that I didn't give him much input for the Dragon Man storyline in #136.

However, with #136 I'd hoped to make a return to regular scripting of the F.F. Partly to motivate myself, I made the theme of the next story arc the 1950s, the decade when I was a teenager—and wherein the likes of Marlon Brando and James Dean and Elvis Presley were re-shaping the image of what a young person could or should be (and look) like. The Brando-starring motorcycle pic *The Wild One* was of course the inspiration for Wildman, leather jacket and all—and my title for the first part, "Rock around the Cosmos," reflected the excitement that I, and everyone I knew, had felt in 1955 when we first heard Bill Haley and the Comets perform the song "Rock around the Clock" in the movie *Blackboard Jungle*. From the early '50s through James Dean's three flicks (especially *Rebel without a Cause*) through Elvis debuting with "Heartbreak Hotel" in early 1956—that's when it all came together (or fell apart, depending on how you looked at it) for teenagers, and for American society. Of course, the (not unjustified) fear of Communism and of nuclear war had played a large part in that decade, as well—so enter Warhead.

Still, despite my enthusiasm for the subject matter, I found myself stretched for time. So, again with reluctance but with confidence the mag would be well-handled, I turned over the dialoguing of #136 to Gerry. Despite having "only" been born in 1952, he beautifully caught the spirit of the already-penciled #136, then took my few concepts and turned them into a full-blown script in #137. That worked out so well I not only asked him to continue as the mag's writer—I even let him him bring back, in #138-139, the Miracle Man, the quasi-sorcerous bad-guy from *F.F.* #3 that not even Stan and Jack had ever been able to turn into a viable villain.

And the beat, as they say, went on….

2011

Roy Thomas has been a writer and editor in the comic book field since 1965, and counts Fantastic Four *as one of the most influential comics in his life, with the Thing as his all-time favorite Marvel hero (unless you count Conan the Barbarian). Roy still scripts comics from time to time, edits the comics-history magazine* Alter Ego, *and since 2000 has worked with Stan Lee on the* Amazing Spider-Man *newspaper comic strip.*

FOREWORD INTO THE PAST
BY GERRY CONWAY

As always, when it comes to the nitty-gritty, Roy's memory is much better than mine. I like to think of myself as a "big picture" man, by which I mean, if you need details about who did what, when, and why, I'm not the guy you want testifying on your behalf in your trumped-up murder trial.

That said, I have some pretty clear memories surrounding this first year of my year-and-a-half run on The World's Greatest Comic Magazine. As it was for Roy, having a chance to script the adventures of the Fantastic Four was something of a dream come true, but for me (unlike Roy) it was the fulfillment of a childhood dream.

I started reading comics when I was in kindergarten or first grade back in the late 1950s, but like much else (though perhaps more legitimately) the details of what I read are fuzzy in retrospect. I know I read *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*, I'm pretty sure I read *Tarzan* and *The Lone Ranger*, and I definitely remember enjoying the occasional Superman tale. But with a handful of exceptions, none of what I read made much of an impression on me. They were just stories; they entertained me, and they were easily forgotten. (I might have mentioned, I'm good at forgetting stuff.)

And then along came *Fantastic Four* #4.

The cover was what caught my eye first: This oddball triangular-headed guy in a red scaled bathing suit, running straight toward me into the surf, carrying a beautiful blonde woman, and pursued by three—*what*?

A human guy, and a guy who was flying and on fire, and, uh, an orange monster with bricks for skin.

I was…intrigued.

I don't think I held my breath until my face turned blue to get my mom to buy me that comic, but that's what I would've done if she'd said no. I didn't just *want* to read that story. I *had* to read it. And when I did, I realized I'd never seen anything like this before. It was a super hero comic book with angry super heroes. It was a super hero comic book with super heroes who didn't get along, who didn't even seem to like each other. It was a super hero comic book with super heroes who fought the way my sister and I fought over who called who stupid first, or the way my friends and I traded insults till one of us got mad and burst into tears (not me, no sir) or how my parents sometimes argued when my sister and I were watching TV, and then made up by the time we all went to bed... at least, I think they did.

In short, this was a comic book that read, weirdly, *as if it were happening in the real world*.

For those of you who've grown up with a comic book marketplace overflowing with super heroes who don't get along, who have real-life problems, and more-or-less true-to-life personalities, trust me when I tell you, *you have no idea how radical this concept was* for those of us who grew up reading Dell Comics' *The Lone Ranger* or DC's red-Kryptonite challenge of the month in *Superman* and *Action Comics*.

Fantastic Four #4 changed my life.

Literally.

Sure, sure, I was only ten years old, and it's hard to imagine one comic book could influence a person's entire life trajectory, but that is exactly what happened.

Fantastic Four #4 changed my life.

Before I read "The Coming of the Sub-Mariner!", I was like any other kid that age: kind of obnoxious, kind of aimless, kind of this, kind of that, sometimes funny, sometimes sticky, a lump on the couch, useless with a stickball bat, shy and loud, a show-off with nothing much to show off, overprotected, and left to run wild.

Fantastic Four #4 changed my life.

After reading that comic (and running back to the candy store around the corner to see if they had any more, and amazingly enough, finding out they had one left-over copy of *Fantastic Four* #3, hallelujah—mom, I need another twelve cents) I suddenly knew what I wanted to do with my life.

I wanted to draw comics.

Specifically, I wanted to draw comics featuring the Fantastic Four.

And that's what I did for the next two or three years. I wrote and drew my own Fantastic Four comics on lined three-ring holed school binder paper, stapled them together, and read them, and gave them to my friends, and drew more Fantastic Four comics, stapled them together, read them, and gave them to my friends.

I bought every issue that came out, and when I learned my cousin Gary had copies of *Fantastic Four* #1 and #2, I gave him a couple of candy bars and some old Superman comics in trade. (My first, though not my last, foray into the sweaty panicky depths of collector-mania.) I discovered other comics published by the same company and started buying them. I became more serious about drawing, and more serious about writing.

And a few years later, when I was fourteen years old, I found out a kid named Jim Shooter was selling comic book stories *he'd written himself* to a publisher in New York.

I lived in New York.

Holy crap.

I guess you see where this is heading.

Long story short, after various adventures, stops and starts, and a redirection of effort from drawing to writing, I too started selling comic book stories *I'd written myself.*

And eventually, sometime in the spring or summer of 1972, just about ten years after I picked up my first issue of The World's Greatest Comic Magazine, Roy Thomas asked me if I could fill in for him by writing the dialogue for an issue he'd plotted and Ramona Fradon drew, which Roy himself didn't have time to script.

Foolish question.

It's hard for me to remember now, but I'm sure I hoped at the time that writing the dialogue for one issue might lead to writing dialogue for another, which might in turn lead to a complete fill-in story or two, which in my wildest dreams I could hope might end up with a permanent assignment…

As it turned out, that's just what happened.

Funny how things work out.

Because of the way I took over the writing on *Fantastic Four* somewhat piecemeal, I don't really feel that *my* run on the title truly begins until #138. Roy makes reference to the fact I was the first writer to bring back The Miracle Man since his sole appearance a decade before, which I did in issue #138. There's a reason I brought him back (and a reason I brought back other semi-forgotten characters like The Dragon Man, and Gregory Gideon, and Wyatt Wingfoot, and others to come in the next volume of *Marvel Masterworks: The Fantastic Four*). It's a purely personal, totally unprofessional reason, and I make no apologies for it:

I was (and am) a total FF fanboy.

The Miracle Man first appeared in *Fantastic Four* #3, which, you may recall, was the second *Fantastic Four* comic I laid hands on. Even though he wasn't much of a villain as originally conceived, he made a terrific impression on my eager ten-year-old mind. He featured in some of the first amateur comic books I wrote and drew and stapled together and read and handed around to my friends. So when I had the chance to write *my very own Fantastic Four story* naturally I had to bring him back (with enhanced powers of course; I might be a fanboy but I wasn't a total idiot). Same with the Dragon Man, same with Gideon, same with good ol' Wyatt Wingfoot.

These days, when people ask how I came up with the idea for a particular story or storyline way back when, most of the time I tell them (truly) I don't remember. I'll add (also truly) my main motivation as a writer of comics back in the 1970s was to write the kind of stories I loved and wanted to read when I was a kid.

That was never more true than when I got my shot to write the Fantastic Four, in the stories you now have before you in this present volume.

As I said, *Fantastic Four* #4 changed my life.

Among other things, it lead me to a place where I was entrusted with furthering the adventures of these super heroes who got angry at each other, fought with each other, and loved each other, in what was then, and still remains (for my money anyway) the World's Greatest Comic Magazine.

2011

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ CC | 129 DEC 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIX MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

EXTRA!! THE HUMAN TORCH QUITS THE F.F.!

STAND AWAY! MEDUSA CLAIMS BEN GRIMM!

NO! HE BELONGS TO THUNDRA--

--OR TO NO ONE!!

ALL THIS, AND THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR, TOO! 'NUFF SAID!

Stan Lee Presents: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

ROY THOMAS *WRITER & EDITOR* * JOHN BUSCEMA *ARTIST* * JOE SINNOTT *INKER* * ARTIE SIMEK *LETTERER*

THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR... PLUS ONE!

*PRESENTING--THE MOST **UN**ORIGINAL LEAD-IN LINE OF THE YEAR:*

WHEN IT RAINS--!

REED! **SUE!** QUICK-- YOU GOTTA **HELP** ME!

THE **THING** IS SICK-- **REAL** SICK!

REED **CAN'T** HELP YOU, JOHNNY! **HE'S** IN AS BAD SHAPE AS **BEN!**

HE NEARLY **BLACKED OUT** AS WE STARTED TO LAND--AND **I** HAD TO FINISH GUIDING THE SHIP DOWN!

THEN... DON'T WASTE YER TIME... ON **ME,** SONNY-BOY...

GO SEE ABOUT **REED!**

LAST THING I WANT ABOUT NOW... IS TA BE AT THE MERCY OF A **WOMAN DRIVER!**

*NOW... **SHALL** WE...?*

*AND **BEGINNING:***

*A MIND-BOGGLING NEW CHAPTER IN THE LIVES OF THE MOST **FABULOUS** FOURSOME IN COMIC MAG HISTORY!*

1137

I'M... ALL RIGHT, SUE. BUT *BEN*...

FATIGUE, DARLING... THE SAME AS ***YOU.*** I'M... ***POSITIVE*** THAT'S IT.

AFTER ALL, HE TOOK A REAL ***BEATING*** FROM THE MOLE MAN'S HORDES...

--***AND*** FROM ONE SLIGHTLY BRAINWASHED ***HUMAN TORCH,*** WHEN I MISTOOK HIM FOR A ***MONSTER.***

WADDA YA MEAN... ***MISTOOK?*** I ***AM*** A MONSTER, KID... AN' DON'T YOU ***FERGIT*** IT!

I NEVER DO.

BICKERING AGAIN! AT LEAST ***THAT'S*** BACK TO NORMAL.

BEN, I'M ***SORRY*** ABOUT ALICIA... ABOUT THE WAY WE FAILED TO FIND A WAY TO HELP HER ***SEE*** AGAIN.

DON'T GIVE UP ***HOPE,*** BEN. I'M SURE THAT, ***SOME*** DAY...

YEAH... SOME DAY...

LOOK, LET'S NOT MAKE A ***BIG DEAL*** OUT OF IT, OKAY? ALICIA'S ***USED*** TO LIVIN' IN THE DARK BY NOW...

SAME WAY ***I'M*** USED TO LOOKIN' LIKE A WALKIN', TALKIN' ***ROCKPILE.***

JUST ***GIMME*** A MINUTE, AN' I'LL BE AS GOOD AS ***NEW.***

I'M GLAD TO ***HEAR*** THAT...

'CAUSE THAT HELPS ***ME*** SAY WHAT I'VE ***GOT*** TO SAY.

YOU ALL KNOW MY GIRL ***CRYSTAL*** IS AN ***INHUMAN*** --AND AN ***ELEMENTAL,*** WHATEVER THAT MEANS--

--AND THAT SHE ***CAN'T LIVE*** FOR LONG OUTSIDE HER PEOPLE'S ***GREAT REFUGE.***

WELL, I'VE MADE A ***DECISION*** --

I'M GOING TO ***JOIN*** CRYSTAL IN THE LAND OF THE INHUMANS-- ***PERMANENTLY!***

JOHNNY-- YOU'VE GOT TO BE *KIDDING!*

I KNOW YOU *LOVE* CRYSTAL-- LOVE HER *DEARLY*--BUT *HER* WORLD, HIDDEN DEEP IN THE HIMALAYAS, ISN'T *YOURS.*

YOU'VE GOT TO *THINK THIS THRU--!*

WHAT DO YOU THINK I'VE *BEEN* DOING FOR MONTHS?

MY MIND'S *MADE UP!*

NO! I WON'T LET YOU *DO* IT, SON!

YOU WON'T *LET--!?*

JUST WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE *TALKING* TO, PAL? I'M THE *HUMAN TORCH,* REMEMBER?

IF YOU *DON'T--* MAYBE THIS'LL *REMIND* YOU!

OWWWW..!

JOHNNY!!

I DIDN'T *HURT* HIM, SIS. HIS *GLOVES* PROTECTED HIM FROM ALL BUT THE *HEAT.*

BUT I'M CUTTIN' OUT-- *NOW!*

THIS CHAMBER'S STILL *SEALED OFF.*

YOU *CAN'T--*

CORRECTION, MISTER KNOW-IT-ALL...

I JUST *DID!*

BEN! THE TORCH IS *RUNNING WILD!*

WE'VE GOT TO *CATCH* HIM, BEFORE HE DOES SOMETHING *FOOLISH.*

Y'MEAN LIKE GO *MARRY* THE CHICK HE LOVES?

I'M *COMIN',* BIG WORDS--

--BUT I DON'T HAFTA *LIKE* IT!

I'VE DONE IT! I'VE REACHED OUR ROCKET SILO.

NOW NOTHING CAN STOP ME!

DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND, OLD FRIEND? WE KNOW SO LITTLE ABOUT BLACK BOLT'S GREAT REFUGE.

IT MAY BE AS DEADLY TO JOHNNY, AS OUR ATMOSPHERE IS TO CRYSTAL.

OKAY, OKAY... BUT WHERE--?

DOWN THIS WAY! OUR NASA MISSILE--!

...USED TO MONKEY AROUND WITH HOT RODS, BACK WHEN I WAS A PUNK KID.

AND BOY, DOES THAT SEEM LIKE A MILLION YEARS AGO RIGHT NOW!

GOOD THING REED TAUGHT ME HOW TO HANDLE THIS BABY, SO I CAN--

BLAST OFF!

WE'RE TOO LATE. HE'S LIFTIN' OFF!

HOLD ON TO IT, BEN.! ONLY YOU CAN DO IT.!

VRRR

YOU'VE GOT TO!

NO SWEAT, LEADER-MAN.

NASA MISSILE OR NO NASA MISSILE, OL' BASHFUL BENJY CAN--

MY HANDS!

RRRRRRRR

THEY'RE-- FADIN' AWAY!!

BEN--YOU LET GO!

HE'S GONE!

SO'RE MY HANDS, HOT-SHOT...

KROOOO

SO'RE...MY.. HANDS...

SUE! THIS IS YOUR DOING--IT HAS TO BE!

ONLY THE INVISIBLE GIRL CAN MAKE PARTS OF OTHER PEOPLE'S ANATOMY SIMPLY--VANISH.

BUT WHY, SUE--WHY ??

HE'S MY BROTHER, REED...BUT HE'S ALSO A MAN.

A MAN GOING TO CLAIM THE WOMAN HE LOVES.

BUT--HAVEN'T I EXPLAINED THE DANGERS TO YOU OFTEN ENOUGH?

ANYTHING MIGHT HAPPEN TO HIM THERE. RADIATION POISONING... RESPIRATORY AILMENTS...

MY POOR, POOR REED. I LOVE YOU SO MUCH...

DON'T YOU CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO HIM?

BUT, IN SOME WAYS...

...IT'S YOU, NOT ALICIA, WHO ARE TRULY BLIND.

'ULP!-- NO TWO WAYS ABOUT IT--SUZIE'S ALL THRU BEIN' THE SHRINKING VIOLET ON THIS TEAM.

WHICH MEANS THAT, IF REED DON'T SEE IT, AN' MAKE A FEW CHANGES AROUND HERE...

...THERE AINT GONNA BE NO MORE TEAM...

"...WITH OR WITHOUT THE HUMAN TORCH!"

HOMING DEVICE'S WORKING LIKE A CHARM.

SHOULD REACH CENTRAL ASIA IN A MATTER OF MINUTES, AT THIS RATE.

'COURSE, I'M GONNA MISS THE EVER-LOVIN' F.F....EVEN THAT STIFF-NECKED BROTHER-IN-LAW OF MINE.

BUT...LATER FOR THAT. RIGHT NOW, ALL I KNOW IS THAT I'M TOOLIN' DOWN TO SEE MY GAL...

TO SEE HER? BULL! TO MARRY HER!

AND THERE'S THE OLD HOMESTEAD NOW!

HEY NOW--WHAT GIVES?

THERE'S SOME SORT OF--TRANSPARENT DOME OVER THE CITY.

I WAS IN SUCH A HURRY--I NEARLY HIT IT!

OKAY, SO I'LL JUST TOUCH DOWN OUTSIDE THE REFUGE INSTEAD, AND THEN--

UH OH! NOW WHAT THE DEVIL--?

ALL OF A S-SUDDEN... THE SHIP'S V-VIBRATING LIKE CRAZY--

VIBRATING, M-MY EYE! SOME KIND OF RAY'S ZEROED IN ON IT--

--T-TEARING IT APART--WITHOUT A S-SOUND--

--NOT EVEN THE SOUND OF SHREDDING METAL!

WELL--SCRATCH ONE BILLION-DOLLAR MISSILE!

WHAT'S THAT BELOW? SEVERAL FORMS--

STREAKING UP TO MEET ME--!

INHUMANS! THREE OF 'EM--AND ARMED TO THE TEETH!

HEY, FELLAS--IT'S JOHNNY STORM--I'M PRACTICALLY ENGAGED TO YOUR OWN CRYSTAL!

HMM... I DON'T SEEM TO BE MAKING OF AN IMPRESSION ON--

SURE--THAT'S IT! IT'S GOT TO BE!

MAXIMUS WAS IN CHARGE WHEN I WAS HERE LAST--AND HE MUST HAVE SEIZED POWER AGAIN!*

ZZIT!

*OBVIOUSLY, JOHNNY HAS HEARD THAT BLACK BOLT REGAINED THE THRONE IN AMAZING ADVENTURES #8--RT.

WELL, YOU TELL *MAXIMUS THE MAD* THAT, IF HE PLANS TO PUT A DAMPER ON THE *HUMAN TORCH*--

--HE'LL HAVE TO UNLEASH MORE THAN *YOU* THREE GOONY-BIRDS!

SSSSZZZL

HOLD IT, HOT STUFF! WHAT'RE YOU *DOING?*

THERE'S A BETTER, *SURER* WAY TO GET INSIDE THAT DOME...

...AND YOU'RE GONNA *GRAB* IT-- *NOW!*

WELL DONE, PINYON. YOU *STUNNED* HIM-- *DOUSED* HIS FLAME--

OUR RULER *OVERESTIMATED* THE OUTSIDER'S POWERS, FLAIDERMAUS.

HE WAS AN *EASY* PREY.

--BEFORE HE COULD *FLEE!*

GOOD! THEY DON'T SUSPECT I *LET* 'EM BLAST ME LIKE FLYING-FISH IN A BARREL.

ONLY THING IS-- *NOW* I'VE GOT TO COUNT ON THEIR BEING ORDERED TO TAKE ME *ALIVE*--

--'CAUSE I *COULDN'T* FLAME ON RIGHT NOW EVEN IF I *TRIED*--

AND, IF ONE OF THOSE CREEPS DOESN'T *CATCH* ME--

:WHEW!:

WE CAN ***CONGRATULATE*** OURSELVES, AVIUS AND PINYON.

AND WE HAVE ***DONE*** SO.

OUR MISSION WAS TO ***STOP*** THE FLAMING ONE FROM ENTERING THE REFUGE ***AT LARGE!***

THEN I WAS ***RIGHT!*** THEY ***KNEW*** IT WAS ME--AND WERE SENT TO ***CAPTURE*** ME.

THAT CAN ***ONLY*** MEAN--THAT BLACK BOLT'S ***NUTTY BROTHER*** IS BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN!

BUT THEN... WHAT ABOUT ***CRYSTAL?*** IF ANYTHING'S ***HAPPENED*** TO HER--

HEY! BIG ***CROWD*** BELOW--

--GATHERING ***AROUND*** SOMEBODY, BUT I CAN'T SEE ***WHO*** IT--

OH NO!! IT ***CAN'T*** BE-- BUT IT ***IS!***

THAT REGAL ***FIGURE*** IN THE CENTER--!

IT ISN'T ***MAXIMUS*** WHO RULES IN THE GREAT REFUGE--

IT'S BLACK BOLT!

THEN--***HE TOO*** HAS TURNED ***AGAINST*** THE HUMANS OF THE OUTER WORLD!

BUT WHY? WHY??

PERHAPS JOHNNY STORM IS SOON TO **KNOW**... PERHAPS **NOT.** MEANWHILE, IN THE FAR-OFF **BAXTER BUILDING**...

...THREE **LONELY PEOPLE** BROOD...THREE SEPARATE ISLANDS OF HUMANITY WHO HAVE NOTHING TO **SAY** TO EACH OTHER...

...TILL SUDDENLY...

REED! THAT BLINDING **BURST!** WHAT--?

EASY, HONEY.

I-- THINK I **KNOW** WHAT IT IS--

--**WHO** IT IS--!

YES, MR. AND MRS. RICHARDS...IT IS I, **AGATHA HARKNESS,** WHO AM FORCED TO CONTACT YOU IN SUCH SINGULAR MANNER.

I AM AWARE THAT YOU **LEFT** WHISPER HILL BUT A FEW SHORT **HOURS** AGO...*

*OR BACK IN ISSUE #127, TAKE YOUR PICK. --ROY.

YET, **MATTERS** HAVE ARISEN WHICH MAKE IT **IMPOSSIBLE** FOR ME TO CONTINUE CARING FOR YOUR INFANT SON **FRANKLIN.**

PLEASE **COME** FOR HIM... **AT ONCE!**

SHEESH! YOU JUST CAN'T GET A DECENT **BABY-SITTER** ANY MORE!

QUIET, BEN! I'M SURE THIS IS SOMETHING **SERIOUS.**

YEAH...LIKE A RED-HOT **MAH-JONGG** MATCH!

BEN... **PLEASE...**

I ASSURE YOU, MR. GRIMM, I WOULD **NEVER** TAKE MY COMMITMENT TO YOUNG FRANKLIN SO **LIGHTLY.** NOW, CAN **SOMEONE--?**

YES--YES, OF **COURSE** WE'LL BE RIGHT THERE!

BUT--**WAIT!** WHY MUST YOU **DO** THIS, MRS. HARKNESS?

WHAT'S **HAPPENED,** THAT--?

I AM **SORRY,** MR. RICHARDS, BUT TO UTILIZE AN OUTWORN CLICHÉ... ...I CAN **SAY NO MORE!**

GOOD-BYYYYY

SHE'S **GONE**...JUST LIKE **THAT!**

WELL, WADDA YA **EXPECT**... WHEN YOU GOT A **WITCH** FER A NANNY?

REED... WE'D BETTER **HURRY...**

I'M SORRY, HONEY, BUT...

I'M AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO PICK FRANKLIN UP BY **YOURSELF.**

I *KNOW* WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO BE *THINKING*, SUE DARLING...

BUT THERE'S SOME WORK IN THE *LAB* I'VE GOT TO DO, AND...

...AND *NATURALLY* THAT COMES BEFORE YOUR DUTIES AS A *HUSBAND*, LET ALONE A *FATHER!*

WELL, DON'T WORRY, *MISTER* FANTASTIC... I'LL GO PICK UP OUR SON *ALONE.*

IN FACT, FROM *NOW ON*...

...I MAY JUST DO A *LOT* OF THINGS ALONE!

IF YOU FEEL LIKE *THAT* ABOUT IT, LADY--MAYBE YOU'D *BETTER!*

YEESH! THAT WASN'T *LIKE* THE ORIGINAL LOVEBIRDS OF FUN CITY!

THEY USETA GO OFF AN' SMOOCH EVERY TIME THEY GOT A SPARE *SECOND.*

BESIDES, I KNOW OL' STRETCH-PANTS LOVES THAT *KID* OF THEIRS AS MUCH AS *SUZIE* DOES.

BUT THERE'S SOMETHIN' *EATIN' AWAY* AT 'EM...

BOTH OF 'EM.

WELL, NO USE TRYIN' TO FIGURE OUT THAT PAIR WITH *MY* SIZE-THREE BRAINBOX.

MAYBE MY GAL *ALICIA* CAN SHED SOME LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT.

AINT *SEEN* 'ER IN A COUPLE'A DAYS *ANYHOW.*

I'LL JUST TAKE THE *STAIRS* DOWN, AND THE *BACK WAY* OUT...

20TH FL.

...SO'S I WON'T BE *CONSPICUOUS.*

I DUNNO...

THE *TORCH* RUNNIN' OFF HALFWAY AROUND THE BLASTED *WORLD*...

AJAX CONSTR.

IZZI LOVES ZELDA!

...SUE AN' REED DOIN' THE *BICKERSONS* BIT...

MAYBE *I* OUGHTTA GIVE THIS *FANTASTIC FOUR* STUFF UP FOR A LOST CAUSE, *TOO.*

YEAH. ME AN' ALICIA COULD GET HITCHED *OURSELVES*, AN' MAYBE MAKE A BETTER *GO* OF IT THAN--

EEEEEE

WUZZAT? A GAL'S VOICE-- SCREAMIN' FOR *HELP!*

COMIN' FROM INSIDE THAT *CONSTRUCTION* SITE.

WELL, IF SOME *MUGGER* THINKS A WOODEN FENCE IS GONNA KEEP OL' *BENJY* OUT...

...HE'S GOTTA *ANOTHER* THINK COM--

HUH??

THIS IS GETTIN' TA BE *MONOTONOUS!*

SPLUMP!

THAT'S THE *SECOND* TIME IN TWO DAYS I BEEN SUCKERED BY ANSWERIN' A *DAMSEL IN DISTRESS...*

AND I'M GETTIN' BLAMED *TIRED* OF IT!

LIKE SOMEBODY SAID, THING--IT AINT WHAT YOU *WANT*, IT'S WHAT YOU *GET!*

WHO IN *BLAZES--?*

THREE GUESSES, ROCK-HEAD...AND THE FIRST TWO DON'T COUNT!

WHO--

THE-- SANDMAN-- !?

I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YA FOR A MINNIT--WITHOUT THAT ZOOT-SUIT OF YERS!

IF YOU MEAN THE COSTUME I USED TA WEAR--FORGET IT!

I DON'T NEED NO FANCY DUDS TO POLISH YOU OFF.

SEZ YOU, BUDDY! I'M GONNA--

YOUR MEMORY GOIN' BAD ON YA, MISTER?

WHA--?

YOU CAN'T HIT A GUY WHO CAN TURN HIS WHOLE MIDDLE INTO GRAINS OF SAND.

MEBBE NOT, BUT AS LONG AS YER SOLID ENUFF TA STAND UP IN ONE PIECE...

...YOU GOTTA BE SOLID ENUFF TO GRAB...

LIKE SO!!

YOU AINT WRONG.

ONLY THING IS, I CAN MAKE MYSELF EVEN LESS SOLID IN A SECOND OR TWO--

--AND THEN YOU'RE OUT IN LEFT FIELD AGAIN!

I'LL GET YOU SOONER OR LATER, SANDY...

AND, WHEN I DO--

FORGET THAT GRAND-STANDING CLOWN FOR NOW, BEN GRIMM.

YOU HAVE FAR MORE URGENT THINGS WITH WHICH TO CONCERN YOURSELF...

...SUCH AS THE PRESERVATION OF YOUR USELESS LIFE!

HUH? NOW THAT VOICE I KNOW!

THEN IT AINT JUST THE SANDMAN THAT WAS LAYIN' FOR ME--

--IT'S THE WHOLE BLAMED FRIGHTFUL FOUR!

IN A FAR TRUER SENSE THAN YOU COULD IMAGINE, MY FRIEND.

MY DEAR TRAPSTER ...IF YOU PLEASE...

MY PLEASURE! THIS PASTE OUGHT TO HOLD HIM, WIZARD.

PLEASE, TRAPSTER... I CHOOSE TO BE CALLED NOT SIMPLY THE WIZARD, YOU KNOW...

...BUT THE WINGLESS WIZARD...

...FOR REASONS QUITE OBVIOUS.

SPLAM

HEY! YOU KNOCKED MY PASTE OFF HIM, BEFORE IT COULD HARDEN!

NO MATTER. I HAVE DECIDED TO END THIS UNEQUAL FRAY IN A MORE PERSONAL MANNER...

BY... DIVE-BOMBIN' ME ...HUH, CREEP?

WELL... COME AHEAD.

I'M DOWN... BUT I'M BETTIN'... I CAN TAKE IT!

WE'LL NEVER KNOW--WILL WE, WIZARD?

WHAT--? STRANDS OF HUMAN HAIR-- GRABBING ME IN MID-FLIGHT!

SURELY IT CAN BE NONE OTHER THAN--

--MEDUSA!

IN THE FLESH, VILLAIN.

OR PERHAPS I SHOULD SAY... IN THE FOLLICLES!

BEN GRIMM! ARE YOU--?

I'M **A-OK,** LADY. I DUNNO WHAT **YOU'RE** DOIN' HERE--

BUT IT'S PLAIN AS DAY YOU **AIN'T** A CHARTER MEMBER OF THE **FRIGHTFUL FOUR** NO MORE!

NOW, WHAT SAY WE **MOP UP** THESE--

LOOK OUT! BEHIND YOU--!

YOU'LL **--PAY** FOR THIS, WOMAN!

WE'LL WORRY ABOUT THAT TURNCOAT **LATER,** WIZ.

RIGHT **NOW,** THING-- LET'S YOU AN' ME PLAY **CATCH--**

-- WITH THIS **BULLDOZER!!**

NAW, SANDY--

I MEAN, I **LIKE** PLAYIN' CATCH AN' ALL...

BUT **ME,** I'D RATHER MAKE THIS A **REAL** BALL-GAME...

...AN' SEE IF I CAN BELT ONE **OUTTA THE PARK!**

SONUVAGUN! NUTHIN' BUT A BROKEN-BAT **FOUL BALL!**

KA-BAM!!!

THEY JUST DON'T **MAKE** THEM THINGS LIKE THEY--

TRAPSTER!

THAT'S MY **NAME,** GRUESOME-- DON'T WEAR IT **OUT!**

NOT THAT YOU'RE GONNA GET THE **CHANCE--**

--'CAUSE, THERE'S **NO WAY** YOU CAN-- DODGE--THIS--

THUNK!

SO WHO SAID I WUZ GONNA **DODGE,** CRUD?

YIIIIIII

NUTS! YOU ALWAYS **WUZ** A WHINER, PAL...

...EVEN BACK WHEN YOU WUZ **PASTE-POT PETE!***

*AND HARDLY A MAN IS NOW **ALIVE** WHO-- OH, FORGET IT. --ROY.

OKAY, WIZ--LOOKS LIKE THE LITTLE LADY JUST GOT SOME **SAND** IN HER EYE!

NOW IT'S TIME FOR **YOU** TO EARN YOUR KEEP!

FSTP

THAT I **SHALL,** MY IMPERTINENT FRIEND...

--BY STOPPING THE **THING** WITH THE AID OF MY NEW, IMPROVED **ANTI-GRAVITY DISCS!**

VOILA!

THAT NUTTY TOY!?

WHY DON'TCHA HIT 'IM WITH A **FLY-SWATTER,** TOO--JUST FER **GOOD MEASURE?**

YOU **SCOFF,** FOOL...BUT YOU WILL **SEE...!**

AWRIGHT, TRAPPIE--MY **SECOND** TIME AT BAT, COMIN' UP--

NO! NNOOO!

AS YOU SO APTLY *PHRASED* IT, MY DEAR TRAPSTER...

NO, *INDEED!*

THIP!

HEY! WHAT THE *SAM HILL--?*

YOU *GOT* HIM, WIZARD! HE'S GOING UP--*UP*--

AND HE'LL *KEEP* GOING UP, TILL HE REACHES THE PERIMETER OF *SPACE* ITSELF--

--UNLESS MEDUSA'S SILKEN *STRANDS* CAN SAVE HIM!

HIS *WEIGHT*-- HIS *MASS*-- ADDED TO THE FRIGHTENING *VELOCITY--!*

I'VE NEVER BEFORE ATTEMPTED ANYTHING SO *DIFFICULT!*

YET, I *MUST* TRY--AND, *MORE*--

--I MUST SUCCEED!

SAVED BY A *FEMALE!*

HOW *MORTIFYIN'!*

BUT *THANKS!*

AWRIGHT, RAPUNZEL--SO I ALREADY *FIGGERED OUT* THEY MUST'A BEEN WAITIN' TO *WAYLAY* ME SOMETIME ON MY WAY TO *ALICIA'S.*

BUT, IF *YOU* AINT ONE OF 'EM ANY MORE, THEN *HOW--?*

TIME FOR THAT *LATER,* BEN GRIMM.

LOOK! THEY'RE *REGROUPING* FOR THE ATTACK!

GLAD TO *HEAR* IT, RED!

'CAUSE THAT JUST MEANS THEY'LL ALL BE STANDIN' *CLOSE-TOGETHER-* LIKE--

--AN' I'LL ONLY HAFTA TOTAL *ONE'A* THIS POOR SCHMOE'S *CRANES!*

DON'T *TALK*, YOU FOOL-- *RUN!!*

IT *IS!!*

IT-- *CAN'T* BE--!

YES-- *RUN--!*

FLEE--

SCATTER--

SCAMPER BACK TO YOUR *RABBIT-HOLES--*

--LIKE THE MISERABLE MALE *RODENTS* YOU REALLY *ARE--*

FA-ROOM-BOK!

--AND LET *THUNDRA* DO YOUR FIGHTING FOR YOU!

HAH! THE *NOT-SO-FRIGHTFUL FOUR,* RUNNING LIKE A PACK OF SCARED CONIES FROM *ONE LONE MAN!*

PERHAPS, AFTER *ALL,* I HAVE CHAMPIONED THE *WRONG SIDE* IN THIS PETTY DISPUTE.

BUT *NO!* NO ONE BUT I *SHOULD* BE ABLE TO STAND IN BATTLE AGAINST THE SO-CALLED *THING!*

FOR, ONLY *I* AM... *THUNDRA!*

YOU ALREADY *TOSSED* YER MONICKER AT US, GIRLIE! NOW HOWZABOUT SOME-THIN' A WEE BIT MORE *BASIC,* LIKE-- WHAT'S A *SEVEN-FOOT GAL* LIKE *YOU* DOIN' IN A PLACE LIKE *THIS.??*

I HAVE *SAID* IT: IT IS WRITTEN THAT WE DO *BATTLE* WITH EACH OTHER.

NEGATIVE, LADY! I MAY *LOOK* LIKE A ROUGHNECK--

BUT FIGHTIN' *WOMEN*--EVEN ONES THAT'RE *BIGGER* THAN ME--

BEN--HER *CHAIN--!*

DON'T **SWEAT** IT, CARROT-TOP-- I SEEN THAT COMIN' WAY BACK **WHEN.**

AINT NO CHAIN **MADE** GONNA PUT A DENT IN THIS HIDE OF **MINE!**

IT WASN'T MEANT TO **HURT** YOU, UGLY ONE--

--MERELY TO BRING US **CLOSER** TOGETHER--

--SO THAT I COULD DO-- **THIS!!**

*ROLL YOUR **OWN** SOUND EFFECT, EFFENDI--WE CAN'T THINK OF ONE THAT WOULD DO THUNDRA'S MURDEROUS BLOW **JUSTICE!** --ROY AND ARTIE.

WHAT? **BEATEN** ALREADY? AND I WAS TOLD YOU WERE ONE OF THE **STRONG-EST** MALES ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH!

IF SO, THERE IS LITTLE POINT IN MY **STAYING** HERE ANY LONGER.

I MIGHT AS WELL **DEPART...**

NOT SO **FAST!** YOU CAUGHT BEN GRIMM **OFF-GUARD,** BUT YOU'VE YET TO DEAL WITH **MEDUSA!**

=MMMFF!=

I DID NOT EXPECT AN ATTACK FROM A TREACHER-OUS **SISTER!**

BUT, IF DEAL WITH YOU I **MUST--**

--THEN DEAL WITH YOU I SHALL--

--IN A WAY YOU'LL NEVER LIVE TO REGRET!

HOLY CATS!

--WHETHER I WANT TO OR NOT!

LOOKS LIKE I'M JUST BOUND TA PLAY ME SOME CATCH TODAY--

SKOOP!

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL A SAVE!

YOU OKAY, RED? I USED THE SOFTEST DIRT I COULD FIND ON THE SPUR'A THE MOMENT LIKE THAT.

IT WAS... MORE THAN ADEQUATE.

BUT--THUNDRA--SHE'S EVEN MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE OTHER THREE!

COULD BE. SPEAKIN' OF WHICH, I WONDER WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM CRUDDY--

WONDER NO MORE, MONSTER! THUNDRA HAS DELAYED YOU LONG ENOUGH.

NOW IT IS THE TURN OF THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR!

BEN! THEY'VE ALL COME RUNNING BACK, LIKE JACKALS AROUND A WOUNDED LION.

YA LIE DOWN WITH FROGS, BABY... AN' YA GET UP WITH WARTS.

YOU'RE GONNA **PAY** FOR THAT REMARK, PAL!

STAND AWAY! THE MALE IS **THUNDRA'S** PREY. THAT WAS OUR **BARGAIN.**

DEAL'S **OFF,** TOOTS-- AS OF **NOW!**

NO! HE IS **MINE** TO DEFEAT, DO YOU HEAR ME? **MINE!**

WHAROW!

YOU MEAN **OURS!**

LOOKS LIKE WE BELTED HIM AT THE **SAME** TIME-- AND THAT **FINISHED** HIM!

AND **MEDUSA'S** TOO BEAT TO DUCK THIS **PASTE-BLAST** OF MINE.

DON'T KNOW HOW SHE GOT WIND WE WERE GONNA **AMBUSH** GRIMM--

AND SHE AINT GONNA **TELL** US-- 'CAUSE THAT PASTE'LL **CONTRACT** SO SHE CAN HARDLY **BREATHE!**

IT IS **YOU** WHO MUST ANSWER, SANDMAN-- ANSWER TO **THUNDRA!**

YEAH? WELL, I'M A FIRM BELIEVER IN **EQUAL RIGHTS,** GIRLIE--

--INCLUDIN' THE RIGHT TA **BELT** YOU RIGHT IN THE--

STOP IT--

--BOTH OF YOU!

THAT'S **BETTER!** WE STAND HERE, POISED ON THE EVE OF OUR GREAT **TRIUMPH--**

FOR, WE SAW THE HUMAN TORCH **LEAVE** THE BAXTER BUILDING--

AND THE MIGHTY **THING** IS OUR HELPLESS **PRISONER.**

IF WE DO NOT FALL OUT AMONG **OURSELVES--**

WHO IS LEFT WITH **POWER** ENOUGH TO PREVENT US FROM GAINING OUR **FINAL REVENGE?**

THE OBVIOUS ANSWER IS... **NO ONE.**

NO ONE AT ALL.

NEXT: THE END OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!! (NO LIE!)

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ CC | 130 JAN 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIX MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

STERANKO
SINNOTT

BATTLEGROUND: THE BAXTER BUILDING!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

ROY THOMAS *WRITER/EDITOR* and JOHN BUSCEMA *ARTIST* * JOE SINNOTT *INKER* * *ARTIE SIMEK, LETTERER PETRA GOLDBERG, COLORIST*

BATTLEGROUND: THE BAXTER BUILDING!

THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR--ON THE BRINK OF TOTAL TRIUMPH! AND SMALL WONDER--FOR, THE LATEST RECRUIT TO SWELL THEIR UNSERRIED RANKS IS NONE OTHER THAN THE MYSTERIOUS SEVEN-FOOT MISS (OR MS.) KNOWN ONLY AS--

THUNDRA!

THE BESTIAL THING--OUR CAPTIVE, AT LAST!

I MUST SAVOR THIS MOMENT OF MOMENTS!

DO NOT SAVOR IT OVERLONG, WIZARD!

THE NIGHT GROWS NEARLY AS SHORT AS MY PATIENCE.

LOOK, LADY--WE'VE GOT A BIT OF CROWING COMING!

AFTER ALL, THAT GUY GRIMM WASN'T ANY PUSHOVER.

AN' NEITHER WAS THIS FEMALE BENEDICT ARNOLD HERE!

11602

YEAH, THAT'S *RIGHT,* MEDUSA... I'M TALKIN' ABOUT *YOU.*

FAR AS *I'M* CONCERNED, WE COULD KNOCK OFF YOU AN' HIM *RIGHT NOW--*

--I WOULDN'T LOSE NO *SLEEP* OVER IT.!

YOU WASTE YOUR *BREATH,* SANDMAN, BERATING ONE WHOM THE TRAPSTER'S *PASTE-RINGS* HAVE SQUEEZED INTO *UNCONSCIOUSNESS.**

*LAST ISSUE... WHEN ELSE? --ROY.

YEAH, I KNOW. I *KNOW.*

BUT SHE USED TO BE *ONE* OF US-- TILL SHE *TURNED* ON US.

I AINT *FORGETTIN'* THAT--NOT *EVER!*

*MEANWHILE, THE FLAME-TRESSED **THUNDRA** IS FINDING SOMETHING ELSE **EQUALLY** UNFORGET-TABLE...*

STRANGE. EVEN THOUGH I SOUGHT THIS MAN *OUT...*

...TO *DEFEAT* HIM, TO *HUMBLE* HIM AS NEVER BEFORE...

...I SEE NOW WHAT I *OVERLOOKED* IN THE HEAT OF *BATTLE...!*

THERE IS... *SOMETHING* IN HIS CRAGGY FACE...

...SOMETHING INHERENTLY *NOBLE,* WHICH NIGH MAKES ME DOUBT MY *MISSION* HERE, AS IF--

OH NO YOU DON'T, GIRLIE!

SANDMAN! HAVE YOU GONE *MAD??*

DON'T GET IN MY *WAY,* WIZ.!

I CAN ALWAYS *TELL* WHEN A DAME'S STARTIN' TO GO *SOFT* ON ME.

IT HAPPENED *BEFORE--* TO *MEDUSA--*

AND IT *AINT* GONNA HAPPEN *AGAIN--*

--IF I HAVETA *SPLATTER* THIS CREEP ALL OVER *MANHATTAN!*

NO!
I CAME TO HUMBLE-- AYE, EVEN TO HUMILIATE--
BUT NOT TO MURDER!!
HOLY COW! SHE'S NOT ONLY STRONG AS A FREIGHT TRAIN--
--SHE'S FAST AS ONE, TO BOOT!
AHHH... THE LITTLE ONE IS UNHARMED.
BUT THE TWIN BLOWS THAT FELLED HIM WILL KEEP HIM UNCONSCIOUS FOR HOURS.
AND NOW--
NOW WHAT, WOMAN?
HEYyyy'yyy
NOW THIS, WORM!
IF YOU COME NEAR ENOUGH TO THIS MAN TO SO MUCH AS BREATHE UPON HIM--
--YOU'LL ANSWER TO THUNDRA!!
I'LL ANSWER TO YA RIGHT NOW, LADY--
--WITH A FIST RIGHT IN THE--
I THINK WE'VE HAD THIS CONVER-SATION BEFORE, SANDMAN!
YAAA
WE'LL NOT HAVE IT AGAIN!

WHAT.?! HE HAS BURST INTO SAND-PARTICLES, WHICH REASSEMBLE EVEN AS HE COMES TO REST!

THEN, I SHALL SMASH HIM AGAIN--AND AGAIN, UNTIL--

NO! WE KEPT OUR PART OF OUR BARGAIN, BY TAKING YOU TO ONE OF THE STRONGEST MALES ON EARTH.

NOW, THE TIME HAS COME FOR YOU TO KEEP YOURS.

THE MAN NAMED REED RICHARDS--AND THE STAGGERING SCIENTIFIC SECRETS HE WIELDS--MUST BE MASTERED BY THE NEW FRIGHTFUL FOUR.

THIS VERY NIGHT--THE BAXTER BUILDING MUST FALL!

AND FALL IT WILL, WINGLESS WIZARD, OLD BOY--AT LEAST, IF IT'S UP TO THE HUMAN TORCH TO SAVE IT!

FOR, AT THIS MOMENT, HE IS HALF A WORLD AWAY...!

BEWARE, FELLOW INHUMANS! THE YOUTH'S HELPLESSNESS WAS MERELY FEIGNED.

LOOKS TO ME LIKE A LOT OF THINGS'VE BEEN FAKED AROUND HERE--

--INCLUDING YOUR PRECIOUS BLACK BOLT'S PRETENDED FRIENDSHIP FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

YOU JUDGE TOO HASTILY, AS ALWAYS.

KARNAK SPEAKS THE TRUTH, JOHNNY STORM. LISTEN TO ME--

LOOK, I DON'T CARE TWO HOOTS IN HOBOKEN ABOUT ANY FAIRY TALES YOU CHARACTERS MAKE UP.

ALL I KNOW IS, I'M TOOLING HERE IN A ROCKET TO SEE MY GAL CRYSTAL--

AND THE NEXT THING I KNOW: ZAP! CRUNCH! POWIE!

--I'M SITTIN' ON AIR AT 60,000 FEET!

IT WAS... THE ONLY WAY, MY YOUNG FRIEND.

BLACK BOLT WANTED TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT HE SAW YOU--BEFORE YOU SAW CRYSTAL.

YEAH? WELL--HE'S SEEN ME. BIG DEAL.

BUT--YOU TALK AS IF SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH CRYSTAL. IS SHE--?

SHE IS WELL, NEVER FEAR.

IN FACT, SHE STANDS EVEN NOW WITHIN YONDER *TOWER....!*

SPEAK OF AN *ANGEL!* I *SEE* HER!

DON'T KNOW WHY SHE'S NOT *DOWN* HERE, BUT--

THANKS, TRITON. SEE YOU *AROUND.*

JOHNNY STORM--NO!!

YOU MUST *NOT* GO TO HER-- NOT TILL I HAVE *EXPLAINED* TO YOU--

LET *HER* DO THE EXPLAINING--IN BETWEEN *KISSES!*

FLAME ON--

--AND *BLAST OFF!!*

WHOOOSH!

THIS IS WHAT I *FEARED*-- THE REASON I GAVE THE ORDER THAT HE *NOT* ENTER THE GREAT REFUGE *AT LARGE.*

ARE YOU SURE WE DO THE *RIGHT THING,* AMPHIBIAN? AFTER ALL, SOONER OR *LATER--*

LET IT BE *LATER* THEN!

IT SHALL BE AS *BLACK BOLT* WISHES, TRITON.

AT LEAST OUR *JET-CYCLES* ALLOWED US TO *OUTSTRIP* HIM HERE.

HEAR ME, JOHNNY STORM! WE MEAN YOU NO *HARM,* BUT YOU MUST *HEED--*

NO USE! HE IS LIKE A *MAN POSSESSED!*

NOW HE *STREAKS AWAY* EVEN FASTER THAN *WE* CAN FOLLOW.

TRULY, HIS *FIERY POWERS* ARE STRONGER EACH TIME WE *MEET.*

BUT--WHERE HAS HE *GONE?*

HE FLEW AROUND THAT *BUILDING* YONDER--AND *VANISHED* LIKE A SUMMER FLAME.

HE COULD BE-- *ANYWHERE.*

YOU *MUST* FIND HIM! YOU *MUST!*

WE *SHALL,* LITTLE COUSIN.

HMMM...PERHAPS WE GO ABOUT THIS IN THE *WRONG WAY,* TRITON.

AFTER ALL, TO REACH CRYSTAL, HE MUST *ENTER* THE TOWER...

AND WE SHALL BE *WAITING* WITHIN!

WELL *THOUGHT,* GORGON.

SO *I* THOUGHT-- YET, LONG *MINUTES* NOW HAVE PASSED, WITH NO--

HE *MUST* COME THRU HERE.

THERE'S *NO* OTHER WAY!

IS THERE *NOT,* COUSIN TRITON?

I FEAR WE'VE ALL OVERLOOKED --THE *OBVIOUS.*

MEANING-- *WHAT?*

MEANING THAT THE VERY *STONES* BENEATH MY HOOVES FEEL-- *WARM.*

AND THAT WARMTH *INCREASES* APACE, AS I DRAW NEAR THIS *WALL.*

DON'T YOU *SEE,* INHUMANS? CAN'T YOU *FEEL?*

THERE *IS* YET ANOTHER WAY TO THE CITADEL WHERE *CRYSTAL* STANDS TREMBLING.

JOHNNY STORM IS CLIMBING UP THRU THE *WALLS* OF THE TOWER ITSELF--

--BURNING AND *MELTING* THE VERY STONES BEFORE HIM, IN HIS VOLCANIC *FURY!*

SO FAR...SO **GOOD.** ONLY... CAN'T KEEP UP THIS MUCH FIRE-POWER FOR **LONG.**

BUT--**WHAT GOES ON?** WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO **KEEP** FROM ME?

THERE! I'M BREAKING **THRU** NOW-- INTO THE **UPPER CHAMBER.**

ANOTHER **MINUTE...** AND I'LL KNOW...THE **ANSWER!**

M-MADE IT--!

OH, NO--

NNOOO!!

CRYSTAL, BABY! IT'S ME-- **JOHNNY!**

WHAT **IS** THIS PLACE--AND WHY ARE YOU **HIDING** FROM ME?

WHATEVER IT IS, WE'LL FACE IT **TOGETHER**-- JUST YOU AND **ME**--

--LIKE **FOREVER!**

OH, JOHNNY... JOHNNY...

I HAD **PRAYED...** I'D NEVER **SEE** YOU AGAIN.

BUT, I GUESS I ALWAYS **KNEW...** IT WOULD **BE** THIS WAY...!

PERHAPS THERE WAS NO **OTHER** WAY... IT **COULD** HAVE BEEN.

QUIT THE **DOUBLE-TALK,** HONEY, AND--

HEY! THERE'S SOMETHING **BEHIND** YOU-- SOMETHING THAT--

I'LL...STAND **ASIDE,** SO YOU CAN SEE... MORE **CLEARLY.**

NOW CAN YOU SEE, JOHNNY?

NOW CAN **YOU??**

YEP. HE **SEES,** ALL RIGHT.

BUT WE DON'T--AT LEAST, NOT TILL NEXT ISSUE!

RIGHT NOW, WE'VE GOT REED RICHARDS ON OUR BEADY LITTLE MINDS...

AND, WHAT'S ON HIS MIND AT THIS MOMENT IS HIS SUPER-SPOUSE SUE--WHO WENT AWAY MAD TO FETCH THEIR INFANT SON FROM WHISPER HILL--

--AS WELL AS HIS BLAZING BROTHER-IN-LAW, WHO'S QUIT THE F.F. AND ROCKETED OFF TO FIND THE GIRL HE LOVES--

--AND BASHFUL BEN GRIMM, WHOSE TROUBLES ARE AS NEAR AS THE CLOSEST MIRROR.

IN FACT, HIS MIND IS ON VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING EXCEPT--

BLAST!!

--THE GLEAMING METAL CYLINDER HE HURLS CARELESSLY ASIDE!

THEN SUDDENLY--WITH A TRAINED SCIENTIST'S INSTINCT FOR CAUTION--NOT TO MENTION SELF-PRESERVATION--

GOOD LORD!

WHAT HAVE I DONE??

WHEW!-- A SHOESTRING CATCH, IF EVER THERE WAS ONE!

THAT FLASK CONTAINS HIGHLY UNSTABLE RADIOACTIVE PARTICLES.

IF IT HAD HIT THE FLOOR --MAYBE DETONATED--

--THERE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ENOUGH LEFT OF THE BAXTER BUILDING FOR OUR IRASCIBLE LANDLORD TO KICK US OUT OF!

SPEAKING OF WHICH--THERE'S THE ELEVATOR ARRIVING NOW.

MR. WILKINS--COME TO SERVE US OUR FINAL WALKING PAPERS?

SUE--BACK WITH OUR BABY, AND READY TO LISTEN TO AN ABJECT APOLOGY?

BEN--BACK FROM THAT CONSTITUTIONAL HE TOOK, HOURS AGO?

MAYBE EVEN JOHNNY --READY TO SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE AGAIN?

FACE IT, RICHARDS--

RIGHT ABOUT NOW, ANYBODY THIS SIDE OF DR. DOOM GETS THE RED CARPET TREATMENT!

YET, WHEN THE ELEVATOR DOOR FINALLY OPENS...
NO ONE!
NOT EVEN WILLIE LUMPKIN, WITH A FRESH TRUCKLOAD OF MAIL!
BUT, THIS CAR'S SUPPOSED TO STAY AT GROUND LEVEL, UNLESS--
--UNLESS THERE'S SOMEBODY ABOARD, RICHARDS?
WELL, THERE IS SOME-BODY.
THERE'S ME!!
THE SANDMAN! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN!
YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN!?
THAT'S WHAT YOU ALWAYS SAY--AFTER I CATCH YOU FLAT-FOOTED!
SURROUNDING ME--WITH TENTACLES OF SAND!
GOT TO MAKE A BREAK FOR IT--!
ALWAYS RIGHT IN THERE WITH THE ONE-LINERS, HUH, EGGHEAD?
WHERE DO YOU GET ALL THAT SNAPPY DIALOGUE, ANYHOW--
--OFF THE WHEAT CHEX EXPRESS??
NO MORE WISE-GUY CRACKS, HUH, RICHARDS?
BUT THEN, IT'S KINDA HARD TO TALK--WITH SAND IN YOUR MOUTH.
HARD TO BREATHE, TOO, I'LL BET!
OKAY, PEOPLE-- IT'S OVER!
HE'S LIMP AS TINY TIM'S WRIST!
COME AN' GET IM-- BEFORE I THROW 'IM AWAY!

ENOUGH OF YOUR INCESSANT BRAGGADOCIO, SANDMAN!

YOUR ASSIGNMENT WAS TO CAPTURE REED RICHARDS--NOT TO ASSASSINATE HIM.

THE SANDMAN MEANT NO OFFENSE, WIZARD.

THAT'S JUST HIS WAY--LIKE YOURS IS USING FIVE-DOLLAR WORDS.

YOU ARE ALL FAR TOO LOQUACIOUS FOR THUNDRA'S TASTES.

I'LL REJOICE WHEN MY MISSION IS COMPLETE--AND I LEAVE THIS MAD LAND!

YOU KEEP TALKING ABOUT A MISSION, GIRL--BUT YOU NEVER EVEN TOLD US WHAT IT IS--OR WHERE YOU COME FROM. WHY DON'T YOU--?

YOU KNOW WHAT THUNDRA WANTS YOU TO KNOW.

PRESUME NO FURTHER, TRAPSTER!

HEY, TRAPPY--HOW COME THE KID-GLOVES TREATMENT FOR RICHARDS?

AINT WE GONNA WASTE 'IM--ONCE WE'VE GOT ALL WE CAN OUT OF HIM?

QUIET, YOU FOOL! DON'T YOU SEE ANYTHING?

THUNDRA'S THE HIGH-MINDED TYPE--WANTS TO BEAT UP ON SUPER-GUY TYPES, BUT DOESN'T WANT THEM KILLED.

WE'RE JUST HUMORING HER TILL WE DON'T NEED HER ANY MORE. AND THEN--

I LIKE IT NOT, WIZARD...

I WAS WILLING ENOUGH TO SLAY THE SCARLET TRESSED SISTER WHEN SHE ATTACKED ME--

BUT, I HOLD NO TRUCK WITH UNGALLANTRY TOWARD THE WEAKER SEX.

THE WEAKER--?! OH--OF COURSE, MY DEAR...OF COURSE.

AND WE SHALL TREAT THEM WITH ALL DUE DEFERENCE... SHALL WE NOT, MY FRIENDS?

NOW COME...

ONCE BEFORE WE BRAVED OUR FOEMEN'S STRONGHOLD--BUT GOT NO FURTHER THAN REED RICHARDS' NEGATIVE ZONE TELEPORTER.

THIS WAY LIES THE MAIN LABORATORY--WHERE THE MAJORITY OF HIS TECHNOLOGICAL MARVELS ARE KEPT.

AND NOW, WE SHALL SEE WHAT WE SHALL SEE...!

WELL, I'LL SAY *THIS* FOR THE PLACE, WIZ...

IT SURE BEATS HECK OUTTA MY OLD *ERECTOR SET!*

THIS IS A *TREASURE-TROVE*, FAR BEYOND EVEN *MY* WILDEST DREAMS.

WITH WEAPONRY SUCH AS THIS, I COULD--DARE I SAY IT?-- *RULE THE WORLD!*

"I"?

YOU MEAN *WE*, DON'T YOU, WIZARD?

AW, DON'T GET YER *PASTE* IN AN UPROAR, TRAPSTER.

HE DIDN'T *MEAN* NUTHIN' BY IT, *DIDJA*, WIZ?

MAYBE HE *DID*-- AND MAYBE HE *DIDN'T.*

JUST THE *SAME*, I DON'T DIG--

WHAT IN *BLAZES*??

HEYYY!

ZRAP!

THAT GIZMO I WAS *LEANIN'* AGAINST--IT WENT OFF *ALL BY ITSELF*-- NEARLY *CREAMED* YA!

"*WENT OFF ALL BY ITSELF*"? WHAT KIND OF FOOL DO YOU *TAKE* ME FOR, SANDMAN?

YOU'RE OUT TO TAKE *MY* SHARE OF THE LOOT-- *ALL* OF YOU!

BUT THE TRAPSTER IS *NOBODY'S* FALL-GUY!

GLAD TO *HEAR* IT, PETEY-BOY.

'CAUSE THAT MEANS IT'S JUST AN *OPTICAL ILLUSION* THAT YOU ZAPPED THE WIZARD WITH YER NUTTY *PASTE-GUN.*

MMRRRFF!

TRAPSTER--YOU ARE A ONE-TALENTED *FOOL!*

BUT THE *WINGLESS WIZARD* HAS FAR *MORE* POWERS AT HIS DISPOSAL THAN MERE *ANTI-GRAVITY DISCS*--

--AS THIS ENERGY-BLAST SHOULD *REMIND* YOU!

FRRZZZ

WHOA, WIZ-BABY!

SOMETHIN' *FISHY'S* GOIN' ON AROUND HERE!

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF *BABES!*

IT WOULD *SEEM*, MY DEAR COMPATRIOTS, THAT WE ARE *NOT ALONE* WITHIN THESE HALLOWED ENVIRONS.

HUH? WHAT'RE YOU *TALKIN'* ABOUT--?

WAKE UP, YOU WALKING SAND-CASTLE! *THERE*-- IN MY RING OF *PASTE*--

FOOTPRINTS!

SMALL, *DELICATE* FOOTPRINTS, I MIGHT ADD.

SANDMAN--WILL *YOU* DO THE HONORS....?

YOU *SLAY* ME, WIZ--BUT, YOU *GOT* IT!

ONE *HUMAN SANDSTORM*--

--COMIN' RIGHT *UP!!*

WELL DONE, SANDMAN! YOUR GRAINS ARE CLINGING TO A DECIDEDLY *HUMAN* PAIR OF FIGURES!

THEN, SINCE THERE'S NO LONGER ANY *USE* IN MY REMAINING *INVISIBLE*...

...I'LL *END* THIS CHARADE, AND FIGHT FORCE *DIRECTLY* WITH FORCE!

BUT, I *WARN* YOU-- IF YOU HARM ONE HAIR ON MY *BABY'S* HEAD--

WE ARE ALL *CIVILIZED* HERE, DEAR LADY.

WE'LL ALLOW YOU A MOMENT TO SET THE CHILD *ASIDE*...

...AND *THEN* WE'LL SMASH YOU!

THANKS FOR *THAT*, AT LEAST!

STAY *HERE*, FRANKLIN. IF MY POWERS OF *INVISIBILITY* COULDN'T DEFEAT THOSE DEVILS--THEN *PERHAPS*--

FROM THE TONE OF YOUR *VOICE*, TRAPSTER...

...I TAKE IT YOU'VE FOUND MY UNSEEN *FORCE FIELD* A REASONABLY ADEQUATE DEFENSE!

YOU-- *KNOW* IT, LADY! I COULDN'T GET ONE *GRANULE* THRU THAT THING!

STOP HER, SANDMAN-- BEFORE SHE CAN USE HER--

UNNHH!

BAH! I'VE ALLIED MYSELF WITH SPINELESS *WEAKLINGS.*

SHEER *BRUTE FORCE* IS WHAT IS SORELY NEEDED HERE...

RAAK

...POWER SUCH AS NONE SAVE *THUNDRA* DOES POSSESS!

WHAT!? SHE STAGGERS-- *PALES*--BUT THE INVISIBLE FIELD STILL *HOLDS FIRM.*

YOU'VE COME QUITE *CLOSE,* MY DEAR...

BUT YOU'VE *MISJUDGED* THE EXIGENCIES OF THE SITUATION.

AS DID *I,* IT WOULD SEEM, AT A SOMEWHAT *EARLIER* STAGE.

IT WOULD APPEAR I *ERRED* IN GRANTING *IMMUNITY* TO... CERTAIN *NONCOMBATANTS.*

AN OVERSIGHT WHICH, FORTUNATELY FOR US, IS *EASILY* REMEDIED.

WIZARD! I *SENSE* WHAT YOU INTEND. BUT--YOU GAVE YOUR *WORD.*

YOU WOULDN'T HARM-- *HIM!?*

ALL IS *FAIR,* THUNDRA, IN *LOVE* AND *WAR...*

...AND THIS IS MOST *DEFINITELY* WAR!

NO! YOU MUSTN'T--!

LOOK! I'VE BECOME VISIBLE AGAIN!

JUST AS I KNEW YOU WOULD, MY DEAR.

I'D NOT HAVE HARMED YOUR INFANT SON...UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

I AM SOMEWHAT LESS SQUEAMISH ABOUT... LYING.

THEN--YOU TRICKED ME!

BUT--NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS TO ME--

YOUNG FRANKLIN IS SAFE! SAFE!!

OH YES, AND BY THE BYE...DON'T EXPECT YOUR FRIEND BEN GRIMM TO REVIVE IN TIME TO RESCUE YOU, MRS. RICHARDS.

I CALCULATE THAT THE COMBINED FORCE OF THUNDRA AND THE SANDMAN HAVE RENDERED HIM UNCONSCIOUS FOR 3.7 HOURS!

YET, EVEN AS THE WIZARD GLOATS, TWO HEAVY-LIDDED EYES OPEN SLOWLY...YET SUDDENLY...

...AND THIS IS THE FIRST THING THEY SEE!

AWARENESS LASHES OVER HIM IN WAVES NOW...SWIFTLY...PAINFULLY...

...EVER MORE PAINFULLY...!

SHEESH! I FEEL LIKE...SOMEBODY'S INSIDE MY HEAD... AN' MARCHIN' THRU IT...

...WEARIN' HOBNAILED BOOTS, YET!

AN' THERE'S SUZIE--THE WIZARD--AN THAT SEVEN-FOOT AMAZON OF HIS--!

YEAH! NOW I REMEMBER--EVERYTHING!

I REMEMBER THAT I GOTTA GET OUTTA THIS PASTE-STUFF--BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE--

BUT, IF THAT IS BENJAMIN GRIMM'S CRITERION...

...IT IS ALREADY FAR, FAR TOO LATE!

HE'S GETTIN' LOOSE, WIZARD! THE THING'S GETTIN' LOOSE!!

WHAT.? BUT THAT'S--IMPOSSIBLE! I COULDN'T HAVE CALCULATED SO ERRONEOUSLY!

STILL, NO MATTER. THIS CYCLO-RAY OF RICHARDS' WILL TURN HIM TO ATOMS BEFORE HE CAN FREE HIMSELF!

GO, WIZARD-- GO!!

CRUDELY PUT, BUT STILL--

WHAT?? LET GO OF ME!!

NO!!

I HAVE SAID THERE WILL BE NO KILLING OF MEN OR CHILDREN--

--AND THUNDRA'S WORD IS THUNDRA'S BOND!

PHRAK!

NOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND, AT LAST?

IF THE THING BREAKS FREE, THEN I SHALL HANDLE HIM-- AND I ALONE!

BREAK--!? LADY, THAT PASTE OF MINE IS GOOD AND HARD BY NOW.

NOTHING'S GONNA BUST OUT OF IT. NOTHING!

MISTER, THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE WRONG!

AN' IT'S HIGH TIME I SHOWED YOU JUST HOW DEAD WRONG YOU ARE!

IN FACT--THE TIME-- IT REALLY IS--

--IS CLOBBERIN' TIME!

BEN-- YOU'RE *FREE!* THEN--

FOR ONCE IN YER *LIFE,* BIG-WORDS-- DON'T *SAY* ANY-THIN'--

--JUST *DO!!*

RIGHT! FIRST TO FREE *SUE*--

--THEN *MEDUSA*--

AND *THEN*--

LET'S GO, PEOPLE!

:HRRMFF!: NOT AS CLASSY AS *"AVENGERS ASSEMBLE",* PAL...

...BUT I GUESS IT'LL *SQUEAK BY!*

YOU, TRAPSTER! YOU ARE *MEDUSA'S* CHOSEN PREY!

STAY BACK, WOMAN, OR I'LL--

OR YOU'LL *WHAT* TRAPSTER?

HOW *STRANGE!* AN UNACCUSTOMED *SILENCE!*

YOU'LL BE PRETTY QUIET *TOO,* BLONDIE-- AFTER THE *SANDMAN* GETS THRU WITH YOU!

I *KNOW* YOU COULD *KILL* ME--

--WITH A SINGLE ROCK-HARD *BLOW--!*

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT YOU *COULD* DO--

--IF YOU HAD *HANDS*--

--OR *ARMS*--

--OR, FOR THAT MATTER-- A *BODY!*

OH LORD! I'M BEING-- *EATEN AWAY!*

HELP ME, SOMEBODY! *HELP ME!!*

SUE! I DIDN'T *FREE* YOU SO YOU COULD GET INTO THIS *FRAY!*

GRAB *FRANKLIN*-- AND GET *OUT* OF HERE--*NOW!!*

ZZAP!

YES, *DO* THAT, DEAR LADY! THEN THE ODDS WILL BE *FOUR* TO *THREE*--

--AND THAT SHOULD BE ENOUGH FOR US TO WIN *NICELY,* DON'T YOU THINK?

HE'S *RIGHT,* REED! THE BATTLE IS *SEE-SAWING* NOW-- A *STRAW* COULD SEND IT *EITHER WAY!*

I *CAN'T* STOP FIGHTING-- AND I *WON'T!!*

BESIDES, OUR BABY'S *SAFER* THAN YOU THINK--

--BEHIND A *FORCE FIELD* EVEN THE TRAPSTER'S *PASTE* CAN'T SMASH!

SPLUTCH!

SUE--I'M *ORDERING* YOU--KEEP *OUT* OF THIS!

I WON'T LET THE *MOTHER OF MY CHILD--*

BAH! THIS FAMILY FARCE BEGINS TO *PALL* ON ME.

IF *YOU TWO* CAN'T END YOUR FAMILIAL SQUAB-BLING--

--THE *WINGLESS WIZARD* WILL END IT *FOR* YOU!

MY *HANDS!* YOUR ANTI-GRAV DISCS-- PINNING THEM AGAINST THIS *DYNAMO--!*

SO!

THE MOMENT I'VE *LONGED* FOR! THE GREAT REED RICHARDS-- *HELPLESS!*

YOU DON'T *LISTEN* WELL, WIZARD.

I SAID MY *HANDS* WERE PINNED...

I *DIDN'T* SAY I WAS *HELPLESS!*

POK!

RRRK!

MEANWHILE, NEARBY: A CLASH OF TITANS....!

IT IS-- *AMAZING!*

I *KNOW* I AM YOUR *SUPERIOR!* AND YET--SOME-HOW--YOU STAND *AGAINST* ME!

LOOK, WOMAN--I DUNNO JUST *WHO* YOU ARE--OR WHY YOU'RE SO SET ON *BEATIN' UP* ON ME--

BUT IF *I* CAVE IN, MY *BUDDIES* GET WASTED--

--SO I AINT LYING DOWN-- TILL I'M *DEAD!*

YES--I *SEE* IT NOW! YOUR FIERCE *DESPERATION*--THE RESULT OF FIGHTING TO SAVE THE LIVES OF YOUR *LOVED ONES.*

THE *PATERNAL INSTINCT*-- I SHOULD HAVE *SENSED* IT BEFORE!

THEN--THIS IS *NOT* THE CONTEST I SOUGHT, AFTER *ALL!*

IN WHICH CASE--I'D BEST *END* THE BATTLE--TILL *ANOTHER* TIME!*

MMMFF!

WHUMP!

*--WHICH IS *COMING UP*, FAR SOONER THAN YOU *THINK!* --ROY.

HMMM...I SEE MY *ALLIES* HAVE DONE *LESS* WELL THAN I.

PERHAPS I SHOULD LET THEM *STEW* IN THEIR OWN VITAL JUICES...

STILL I MAY HAVE *NEED* OF THEM AT A LATER DATE...

AND SO, *AGAINST* THAT UNLIKELY EVENT--!

FOOM!

NICE GOIN', GIRLIE! YOU MADE THEM CREEPS LET *GO* OF US. NOW WE CAN--

NOW WE CAN GET *OUTTA* HERE, IS WHAT!

THERE IS UNACCUSTOMED *WISDOM* IN THE TRAPSTER'S MOUTHINGS, SANDMAN.

IT'S FORTUNATE MY *LARGEST* ANTI-GRAVITY DISC AWAITS *OUTSIDE*...

...SO THAT WE MAY EFFECT A *STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL!*

CAN'T *REACH* FAR ENOUGH--THEY'RE *GONE!*

WHO *NEEDS* 'EM?

WE MADE A *FINE* FIGHTING FOURSOME, DID WE NOT--EVEN *WITHOUT* THE HUMAN TORCH!

AND WE'D HAVE DONE *EQUALLY* WELL, I'M SURE--*WITHOUT* THE HELP OF A WOMAN WHO CAN'T PUT *FIRST* THINGS *FIRST!*

IF YOU MEAN *ME*, REED--

THEN YOU'VE HAD *YOUR* SAY--NOW I'LL HAVE *MINE*--!

I LOVE OUR SON AS MUCH AS YOU DO... AS MUCH AS ANYONE COULD.

BUT, IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE, YOU DIDN'T THINK OF ME AS A MEMBER OF THE TEAM--NOT EVEN AS A WIFE--ONLY AS THE "MOTHER OF YOUR CHILD"!

I WON'T ACCEPT THAT, REED. NOT NOW--NOT EVER!

SO, UNTIL YOU FEEL YOU CAN TREAT ME AS AN EQUAL, I'VE MADE UP MY MIND. I'M TAKING LITTLE FRANKLIN...

--AND I'M LEAVING! LEAVING YOU--LEAVING THE F.F.!

GOOD!

AT LEAST THAT WAY, OUR SON WILL GET A LITTLE ATTENTION!

VERY WELL THEN. I'M... GOING.

BUT... I WANT YOU TO KNOW, REED, THAT--

DON'T TALK IT TO DEATH, LADY. IF YOU'RE GOING TO GO...

THEN GO!

THE WORDS HAVE BEEN BITTER...THE ACCENTS HARSH. STILL, THERE IS NO ANGER NOW IN THE FACES OF THESE TWO WHO MOVE SLOWLY, HALTINGLY AWAY FROM EACH OTHER...

THERE IS ONLY... SOMETHING INDESCRIBABLY SAD.

YET, MOVE APART THEY DO.

REED--SHE DON'T WANNA CUT OUT--ANY MORE'N YOU WANT HER TO. JUST ONE WORD FROM YOU, AN' SHE'LL--

NO, OLD FRIEND. SHE MADE THIS DECISION...

ONLY SHE CAN UNMAKE IT.

REED RICHARDS, I--I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY--!

THEN DON'T SAY, MEDUSA. JUST LISTEN, PLEASE...BOTH OF YOU.

WE'RE GOING TO FIND JOHNNY STORM--PERSUADE HIM TO COME BACK, AT LEAST--

AND THEN, WITH OR WITHOUT AN INVISIBLE GIRL--NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS--

..."the FANTASTIC FOUR WILL GO ON!"

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ | 131 FEB 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

THE HUMAN TORCH GOES WILD-- IN THE LAND OF THE UNCANNY INHUMANS!

FEATURING-- THE MUTANT CALLED QUICKSILVER! PLUS--THE MOST SHOCKING SURPRISE OF ALL!

STERANKO SINNOTT

Stan Lee Presents: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

REVOLT IN PARADISE!

A MERE MOMENT AGO-- OR, SEVERAL WEEKS BACK, DEPENDING UPON WHETHER YOU GO BY MARVEL TIME OR CENTRAL STANDARD--

-- A BLAZING-HOT JOHNNY STORM CHARCOAL-BROILED HIS WAY THROUGH A HALF-FOOT THICKNESS OF SOLID METAL--

-- ONLY TO BECOME A VERY CONFUSED YOUNG FIREBRAND, INDEED--!

Featuring: (FOR A CHANGE) THE FIERY-TEMPERED HUMAN TORCH

OH NO!! I TRAVELED HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD-- NEARLY GOT MYSELF PERMANENTLY ZAPPED--

-- JUST TO SEE.. THIS!?

YOU'RE A WEE BIT LUCKIER, MARVEL-BOOSTER! ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS RELAX, AND LET--

ROY THOMAS, WRITER/EDITOR,
ROSS ANDRU, GUEST ARTIST,
JOE SINNOTT, INKER,
JOHN COSTANZA, letterer,
PETRA GOLDBERG, Colorist

--FERRY YOU ALONG, STARTING NOW--!

CRYSTAL-BABY! WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU DOING HERE--

-- STUCK OFF IN THIS CRAZY TOWER, LIKE THE GREAT REFUGE'S VERSION OF RAPUNZEL--

--AND WHY THE T.L.C. BIT WITH ANOTHER GUY!?

OH, JOHNNY-- JOHNNY-- IF ONLY YOU HADN'T BARGED IN LIKE THAT!

I WANTED TO SEE YOU-- TO EXPLAIN--

BUT NOT NOW-- NOT YET--!

IT ISN'T YOUR FAULT, CRYSTAL.

AND I WOULD APPRECIATE IT, JOHNNY STORM, IF YOU WOULD CEASE REFERRING TO ME AS "ANOTHER GUY".

THE NAME, AS YOU WELL KNOW, IS PIETRO -- OR QUICKSILVER, IF YOU INSIST ON BEING FORMAL!

PLEASE, PIETRO! JOHNNY-- THIS MACHINE--

YOU OWE HIM NOTHING, DARLING!

DARLING? HE CALLED YOU-- DARLING!

AND YOU-- LET HIM!?

THEN-- MAYBE I DON'T NEED ANY EXPLANATIONS, GIRL!

MAYBE I ALREADY SEE-- WAY TOO CLEARLY--

--YOU'VE BEEN TWO-TIMING ME!!

NO, JOHNNY-- IT ISN'T LIKE THAT! IT ISN'T!

YOU'VE GOT TO LISTEN TO ME--

--AFTER YOU FLAME OFF, THAT IS!

OKAY, SO I DID ACT A LITTLE LIKE A BUSTED THERMOSTAT. SO WHAT?

THAT STILL DOESN'T CHANGE THE FACTS, LADY.

WHAT WOULD ONE OF YOUR TEMPERAMENT KNOW OR CARE ABOUT FACTS, STORM?

LISTEN, SPEED-FREAK... YOU JUST BUTT YOUR POINTY NOSE OUTTA THIS, BEFORE YOU GET IT SINGED!

THIS IS STRICTLY BETWEEN CRYS AND--

--ME.

NOT ANY LONGER, MAN OF THE OUTER WORLD.

NOW, CRYSTAL'S FELLOW INHUMANS WILL TAKE A HAND.

YOU WERE TOLD THAT THIS TOWER WAS FORBIDDEN TO YOU, MY FRIEND.

YOU TRICKED US-- BURNED YOUR WAY INTO IT ANYWAY--

AND NOW, YOU MUST PAY THE PRICE!

YEAH? AND WHO'S GONNA COLLECT IT, FISH-FACE? I'LL--

JOHNNY! TRITON! STOP IT!

ALL OF YOU-- STOP IT!!

A SUDDEN SILENCE HOVERS NEWBORN IN THE AIR. THEN...

YOU WERE... WRONG, TRITON. IT'S NOT JOHNNY WHO MUST PAY THE PRICE WHICH IS TO PAY.

AND PAY IT I WILL...

IT IS... I!

...IF YOU OTHERS WILL LEAVE THE THREE OF US ALONE FOR A MOMENT...

...PLEASE...

OKAY-- THEY'RE GONE.

NOW, LET'S GET DOWN TO CASES:

I WANT TO KNOW WHAT THIS REFUGEE FROM A RACE-TRACK IS DOING IN THE LAND OF THE INHUMANS...

...AND HOW COME YOU WERE COZYING UP TO HIM WHEN I CAME IN!

AND I'LL TELL YOU, IF YOU'LL ONLY--

CRYSTAL-- DO YOU WISH ME TO--?

NO, PIETRO. I'LL HANDLE THIS.

YOU RECALL THAT MONTHS-AGO DAY, JOHNNY, WHEN YOU RESCUED ME FROM DIABLO.*

I HAD TO LEAVE YOU. THEN, SINCE I'VE FOUND I CANNOT REMAIN OVERLONG IN THE OUTER WORLD.

I VANISHED ALONGSIDE LOCKJAW, WHOSE POWER OF TELE-PORTATION AFFECTS ANY WHO GRASP HIS SHAGGY FORM--

"ORDINARILY, WE WOULD HAVE REAPPEARED INSTANTLY IN THE HIDDEN LAND..

"BUT LOCKJAW'S POWERS ARE NOTHING IF NOT ERRATIC...

*A RANDOM REFERENCE TO F.F. #118. -- ROY.

"AND SO, WE MATERIALIZED IN MID-AIR... SOME MILES OUTSIDE THIS HIMALAYAN STRONGHOLD...!

NAME OF THE CHAIRMAN!

GHOSTS -- SUCH AS LEGENDS SAY HAUNT THIS REGION!

WHAT IS THAT??

PAH! THE CHAIRMAN DOES NOT BELIEVE IN GHOSTS!

THEN -- NEITHER MAY WE!

STILL I WISH HE HIMSELF WERE HERE--

TAKA TAKA

-- TO TELL US WHICH OF HIS QUOTATIONS ANTICIPATES SUCH A PHENOMENON!

"AGAIN WE VANISHED, THIS TIME AMID A HAIL OF INEFFECTUAL GUNFIRE...

"ONLY TO APPEAR NEXT MOMENT ON SOME EAST-EUROPEAN BACK-ROAD, BEFORE A FEARFUL, GROVELING PEASANT...

"... WHO WAS ALREADY BABBLING SOMETHING ABOUT A HOLY VISION...

"... EVEN AS WE DISAPPEARED, YET AGAIN...!

LOCKJAW! BY THE GENES OF AGON-- WHAT'S WRONG?

YOU ACT SO STRANGELY-- AS IF DRAWN BY SOMETHING--

--SOME UNGUESSED MESSAGE OUT OF THE VERY ETHER, THAT--

OHH!

"THEN, SUDDENLY, I GLANCED AROUND ME--

"-- AND SAW, DARKLY-- DIMLY-- A NIGHTMARE COME TRUE!

MUTANT FOOL! RUNNING TOWARD THAT WALL WILL NOT SAVE YOU!

I CAN MATCH YOUR SPEED. THUS, IF YOU CAN STOP YOURSELF BEFORE YOU STRIKE IT--

SO CAN A SENTINEL!*

*THAT'S RIGHT, RANGER! CRYSTAL AND HER CONFUSED CANINE WERE ATTRACTED BY EMANATIONS EXPLAINED IN AVENGERS #104! --ROY.

"BUT, THE HURTLING, SILVER-GARBED FORM DID NOT HALT IN TIME--

"AND SO, NEITHER DID HIS CYCLOPEAN PURSUER!

"THE MUTANT AVENGER'S TRICK HAD **SUCCEEDED!** THE ANDROID'S FAR-GREATER **MASS** RESULTED IN ITS TOTAL **DESTRUCTION** AS A SENTIENT, FIGHTING ENTITY...

"BUT, AT WHAT A **COST!**

PIETRO! YOU'RE **HURT**-- I'VE GOT TO--

Y-YOU MUST **GO,** LARRY TRASK-- **HURRY**--

AND-- **DON'T** LOOK BACK!!

"SINCE THAT TIME, I'VE LEARNED THAT YOUNG TRASK **DIED,** HELPING THE MIGHTY **AVENGERS** DEFEAT THE SINISTER SENTINELS...

"BUT, JUST **THEN** --

...**BONES** BROKEN... MUST BE **DYING**... I...

WHAT'S-- THAT **GLOW**--??

SOMETHING-- **APPEARING** IN FRONT OF ME--

-- SOMETHING **HUGE**-- **HORRIBLE**--!

I WON'T **COMMENT** UPON YOUR LACK OF **CHIVALRY,** FELLOW.

IT'S TOO APPARENT YOU STAND IN NEED OF **HELP**...

...HELP WHICH **I** AM HERE TO--

OHH! HE'S **FAINTED!**

LOCKJAW-- **THIS** TIME, YOU **MUST** GET ME TO THE REFUGE--

-- **WITHOUT** FAIL!

"LUCKILY, THIS TIME MY PET DID **NOT** FAIL -- AND, SOON...

WE'VE DONE ALL WE **CAN,** CRYSTAL.

COME! THE NEXT FEW **HOURS** WILL TELL THE TALE.

NO! I MUST BE **HERE** IF HE WAKES.

I FEEL... **RESPON-SIBLE,** SOMEHOW...

RESPONSIBLE? I STRONGLY **SUSPECT,** DEAR COUSIN...

...THAT YOU FEEL RATHER **MORE** THAN THAT...

PERHAPS MORE THAN YOU CAN **KNOW**... FOR NOW...!

"HOURS PASSED, WITH AGONIZING SLOWNESS. THEN, FINALLY...

OHHHH

ALIVE! HE'S--STILL ALIVE!

THEN--HE WON'T DIE! I WON'T LET HIM!

IN THAT CASE, LOVELY ONE...I AGREE TO... GO ON LIVING...!

"RECOVERY WAS RAPID...

...WHY DON'T YOU CONTACT YOUR FELLOW AVENGERS--TELL THEM YOU'RE ALIVE?

NOT UNTIL MY MUTANT POWERS RETURN.

BUT I HAVEN'T TESTED THEM IN DAYS.

PERHAPS THEY HAVE COME BACK...

P-PERHAPS--

--AND--PERHAPS N-NOT--!

PIETRO!

OH, PIETRO--PIETRO, DEAREST--!

I AM--ALL RIGHT, MY DARLING. I--

SINCE THEN, PIETRO'S POWERS HAVE RETURNED-- AND WE--

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DRAW ME A DIAGRAM, LADY. I CAN GUESS THE REST.

OKAY, SO YOU'VE HAD YOUR LITTLE FLING WITH THE STRANGER FROM THE BIG BAD WORLD OUTSIDE.

ALL I WANT TO HEAR NOW, IS--

IS IT HIM YOU LOVE-- OR ME?

THAT'S JUST IT, JOHNNY, I--

I DON'T KNOW!!

YOU DON'T KNOW!?

THAT TEARS IT! NO MORE NICE GUY! I'M DOING SOME THING-TYPE STOMPING AROUND HERE--

--STARTING WITH OL' FASTEST-LIPS-IN-THE WEST, HERE!

TORCH-- STOP IT! THAT WON'T SETTLE ANYTHING!

YOU'LL GET NOWHERE REASONING WITH HIM, CRYSTAL--

--UNTIL I COOL THAT BLAZING TEMPER OF HIS!

YOU AND WHAT ARMY, BUDDY? I'LL--

HUH? MADE A GRAB FOR YOU-- AND MISSED!

YOUR FLAME-POWERS ARE FORMIDABLE, JOHNNY STORM.

BUT, COMPARED TO MINE--

--YOUR REFLEXES ARE SUB-STANDARD!

WHILE *MINE*, ON THE OTHER HAND--

STOP PATTING YOURSELF ON THE *BACK*, BUDDY--

JUST COME AND *GET* IT, BEFORE--

HEY! WHAT *GIVES*, WHITEY?

RRMMMMM

I DON'T *KNOW*! THE WHOLE TOWER-- IS *SHAKING*!

NOW-- WILL YOU TWO COME TO YOUR *SENSES*, OR DO YOU WANT *MORE* OF THE SAME?

THERE'S YOUR ANSWER: IT WAS CRYSTAL'S *ELEMENTAL* POWERS.

WHAT'S *WRONG*, LADY?

AFRAID YOUR BOY FRIEND'LL GET HIMSELF *HURT* IN THE *BIG LEAGUES*?

PLEASE-- *BOTH* OF YOU, I-- I CAN'T *TAKE* ANY MORE!

WHY D-DON'T YOU *BOTH* JUST-- *GO AWAY* SOMEWHERE-- AND LEAVE ME *ALONE*--?

CRYS, BABY-- I'M *SORRY*-- I DIDN'T *MEAN* TO--

WHAT? ONCE *MORE* THE TOWER TREMBLES!

EASE UP GIRL! WE'VE *COOLED* IT, ALREADY!

RRRMMM

IT *WASN'T* ME THIS TIME, JOHNNY.

IT WAS-- SOMETHING *ELSE*!

THEN, *WHATEVER* IT IS, IT MUST BE AFFECTING THE *REST* OF THE REFUGE, AS WELL.

LET'S HAVE A *LOOK*--!

SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND--

--FIND CHAOS-- AND CALAMITY-- AND TERROR!

FLEE! FLEE! THE VERY WORLD WALKS BENEATH OUR FEET!

FLEE WHERE? YOU CAN FLY--

WE CANNOT!

HOLD TIGHT, GIRL! I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOIN' ON--

BUT WE'D BETTER GET OUT IN THE OPEN--LIKE NOW!

BUT-- PIETRO! WHAT ABOUT--?

DON'T SWEAT IT. I GOT A FEELING HE'LL BE--

WELL, WELL-- SPEAK OF A SPEED DEMON!

HE CUT OUT SO FAST HE BEAT US DOWN HERE-- LIKE A ONE-MAN YELLOW STREAK!

LET'S SAVE OUR JIBES FOR LATER, JOHNNY STORM...

OKAY-- DEAL! RIGHT NOW, THERE'S BLACK BOLT.

MAYBE HE KNOWS THE SCORE.

WHAT HAPPENED, MAN? THIS PLACE WAS SHAKIN' LIKE A ROCK REVIVAL.

HEY, I JUST REMEMBERED-- YOU COULD'VE CAUSED SOMETHING LIKE THIS, JUST BY GIVING OUT WITH A YELL.

IS THAT WHAT--?

THE MONARCH OF THE INHUMANS DOES NOT DEIGN TO ANSWER...

...SAVE WITH A UNIVERSALLY-KNOWN GESTURE.

COME. HE WISHES US TO FOLLOW HIM.

HOLY CATS! A CREVASSE-- AND I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO SEE THE BOTTOM!

IS BLACK BOLT TRYING TO SAY-- SOMETHING DOWN THERE CAUSED THE QUAKE?

BUT-- THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE, COUSIN.

ONLY THE ALPHA PRIMITIVES-- OUR WORKER RACE-- DWELL BENEATH THE CITY.

AND THEY HAVE NOT THE INTELLIGENCE TO WREAK SUCH AWESOME HAVOC...

...EVEN WERE THEY INCLINED TO REBEL AGAINST US.

OF COURSE, MAXIMUS ONCE STIRRED THEM INTO REVOLT. STILL...

MAXIMUS! AT THE MENTION OF HIS LONG-MAD BROTHER'S NAME, BLACK BOLT TURNS AND STRIDES TALL AND SILENT THRU NOW-HUSHED STREETS...

AND THOSE WHO WOULD KNOW HIS SECRET THOUGHTS CAN ONLY TREAD GRIMLY BEHIND...

...TILL HE REACHES A CERTAIN ELECTRONICALLY-ACTIVATED CELL, WHERE...

WELCOME, DEAR SILENT SIBLING.

I WAS WONDERING HOW LONG BEFORE YOU PAID ME A VISIT...!

THEN YOU KNOW *WHY* WE'RE HERE, MAXIMUS.

WE WANT TO KNOW IF *YOU* HAD ANY PART IN WHAT JUST OCCURRED.

BUT OF *COURSE* YOU DO.

SINCE, OBVIOUSLY, YOU'VE NOT THE *TALENTS* TO HAVE CAUSED IT *YOURSELVES.*

ENOUGH *PRATTLING,* COUSIN...

ANSWER OUR QUESTION -- THAT IT MAY GO *WELL* WITH YOU.

IT *ALREADY* GOES WELL WITH *ME,* DEAR KARNAK. IT WAS THE *REFUGE* WHICH SHOOK JUST NOW, NOT *I!*

MY *CELL* ELECTRONICALLY *ABSORBED* THE SHOCK!

STILL, YOU POLITELY *ASKED*... SO I SHALL POLITELY *ANSWER.*

NO, IT IS NOT *MAXIMUS* WHO IS AT FAULT, THIS TIME.

THERE'LL BE *MORE* SHOCKS...

...FAR *GREATER* ONES...

...TILL THIS HIDDEN LAND COMES TUMBLING DOWN *AROUND* YOU...

AND IT SHALL BE *YOU* WHO HAVE BROUGHT DESTRUCTION UPON *YOUR-SELVES,* PRECIOUS COUSINS!

YOU! *YOU!* *YOU!*

C'MON. LET'S GET *OUT* OF HERE, CREW.

THIS TIME, HE'S REALLY FREAKED OUT FOR *GOOD.*

YOU! *YOU!* *YOU!* YOU...

HAS HE, RASH YOUTH?

I SINCERELY *HOPE* SO. AND SO IT *SEEMED,* WHEN *LAST* WE SAW HIM...

HE HAD BEEN *TINKERING ABOUT* IN ANOTHER, LARGER CELL... HAVING RECOVERED, QUITE TOTALLY, HIS POWER OF *SPEECH...!**

WELL, BLACK BOLT? HOW DO YOU *LIKE* MY NEWEST TOY?

IS IT NOT A THING OF PRISTINE *BEAUTY?*

WHICH HE LOST, ALONG WITH THE THRONE, IN* ***AVENGERS* *#95.*
-- RECORDER ROY.

WHAT DOES IT DO (I HEAR A STARTLED CRY)?--

WELL, FIRST IT MUST BE TURNED ON...

BLACK BOLT--!?

FEAR NOT, FRIENDS AND WELL-WISHERS,

YOU SEE? MY WONDROUS WHIRLIGIG SPINS 'ROUND AND 'ROUND, IN A VERTIBLE FRENZY OF PERPETUAL MOTION...

...AND DOES... NOTHING!

NOT UNLIKE YOURSELF AS RULER OF THE INHUMANS, EH, BLESSED BROTHER?

"BUT, BLACK BOLT'S SOLE RESPONSE WAS A JUTTING FINGER--A NEARLY-IMPERCEPTIBLE NOD--

"...WHICH EVEN THE SLOW-WITTED ALPHA PRIMITIVES STANDING NEARBY COULD NOT HELP BUT COMPREHEND--!

SO! YOU HAVE YOUR BRAINLESS-BRED LACKEYS TOTE ME OFF, DO YOU, BROTHERS?

WELL, YOU'LL REGRET THIS--AND REGRET IT MUCH--

--WHEN THE GREAT REFUGE LIES IN RUINS ABOUT YOU!

THE MAD ONE'S CURSE DISTURBED BLACK BOLT--SO THAT HE HAD THE STILL-VIBRATING MACHINE EXAMINED BY FINEST INHUMAN MINDS.

BUT THEY FOUND NO DANGEROUS RAYS--INDEED, NO RAYS AT ALL--POURING OUTWARD FROM IT.

THUS, MAXIMUS SITS RAVING IN HIS NEW CELL--AND THE DOLTISH DEVICE STILL SHUDDERS HARMLESSLY.

HARMLESSLY? CAN YOU BE SURE OF THAT, ALL OF YOU?

COULDN'T IT HAVE CAUSED THAT QUAKE?

IT IS NOT BUILT TO ACCOMMODATE EITHER THAT POWER OR THAT PURPOSE, JOHNNY...

STILL, WE *HAD* WISHED YOUR OWN *REED RICHARDS* TO EXAMINE IT--TO SEE *WHAT* PURPOSE, IF ANY, IT WAS DESIGNED TO SERVE.

OUR COUSIN *MEDUSA* WAS DISPATCHED TO *FETCH* HIM HERE, IF HE'D COME...

*"BUT, SHE SEEMS TO HAVE **FORGOTTEN** HER LESS-THAN-URGENT MISSION, FOR REASONS WE CANNOT **KNOW**...!"*

I'LL SEE YOU *SMILING*, REED RICHARDS..

...IF IT'S THE *LAST* THING I DO BEFORE I RETURN TO THE *HIDDEN LAND!*

IT'S JUST *LIABLE* TA BE THE LAST THING YA DO, RED,

OL' *GROUCHO* HERE AIN'T CRACKED A SMILE SINCE *SUZIE* SPLIT AN' TOOK THE *KID* WITH HER.

NOT THAT I CAN *BLAME* 'IM MUCH!

SHE'LL COME BACK, REED. YOU MUST *BELIEVE* THAT!

I... *WANT* TO, MEDUSA... SO VERY *BADLY!*

BUT WHENEVER I CLOSE MY EYES, ALL I CAN *SEE* IS--

BLACK, BLACKER, AN' *BLACKEST*, HUH, BIG-DOME?

WELL THEN, THE *ONLY* THING TA DO IS FOR US TA GET *OUTTA* THESE FOUR WALLS...

...GO FIND THAT MATCHSTICK *BROTHER-IN-LAW* OF YERS, SO WE CAN LEASTWAYS CALL OURSELVES THE *FANTASTIC THREE.*

IT AIN'T EXAC'LY GOT A *RING* TO IT, BUT--

I GUESS.. YOU'RE *RIGHT*, BEN.

IF HE'S STILL AT THE *GREAT REFUGE*, AFTER WHAT MEDUSA'S *TOLD* ME!

HE'LL BE THERE, REED.

WHERE ELSE HAS HE TO *GO* JUST NOW?

THAT'S *ONE* QUESTION, LADY, THAT MIGHT BE ASKED--

--OF *ANY* OF US!

*THAT'S ALL OF REED AND THE THING FOR **THIS** ISSUE, FLAME-KEEPER.*

*AFTER ALL, WE DON'T WANNA **SPOIL** YOU.*

*NOW, BACK TO THE SNOW-TOPPED **HIMALAYAS**...*

...WHERE WE SEEM TO HAVE JUST *MISSED* A TEMPTUOUS LITTLE *TÊTE-À-TÊTE*...

JOHNNY, IF... IF YOU'D ONLY GIVE ME A LITTLE MORE *TIME*...

TIME, LADY? YOU'VE HAD *SEVERAL YEARS* ALREADY.

IF YOU DON'T LOVE ME -- AND *ONLY* ME -- BY *NOW*--

--IT'S TIME FOR *ME* TO READ THE *HANDWRITING ON THE WALL*...!

HUH? *SORRY*, FELLA.

DIDN'T SEE YOU TWO *ALPHA PRIMI-TIVES*--!

THEN OPEN YOUR *EYES*, OUTSIDER...!

...OR YOU'LL NEVER SEE *ANYTHING* AGAIN!

SMEK!

:MMMFF!:

HEY NOW! WHAT *GIVES*? THAT CLOWN *HIT* ME.

I THOUGHT THE *A.P.'S* WERE THE *DOCILE WORKER* TYPE...

THEY-- *ARE!*

YOU! REPORT TO *DISCIPLINE AREA* AT ONCE!

ANY DISCIPLINE ADMINISTERED *THIS* DAY, INHUMAN...

...SHALL BE *YOURS* TO RECEIVE!

COME, TX-12! THE MOMENT IS *HERE!*

THIS IS *CRAZY!*

THOSE TWO ALPHAS ARE *ATTACKING* THEIR INHUMAN *MASTER!*

AND THEY'LL *KILL* HIM, UNLESS I--

FLAME ON!

NOW, LITTLE BITTY BUDDIES--

WE'LL SEE HOW YOU CLOWNS MAKE OUT IN A FAIR FIGHT!

KEEP AWAY, OUTSIDER!

THIS REVOLT IS NONE OF YOUR AFFAIR!

WHAT REVOLT? TWO A.P. APES, WHOSE WORKER TRAINING SOMEHOW GOT SNAFUED?!

I COULD FOMENT A BETTER REVOLUTION IN A NURSERY!

UH OH! NOW WHAT?

COOL DOWN, PEOPLE. THE HUMAN TORCH HAS THE SITUATION WELL IN HAND, SO--

OH, JOHNNY-- DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED?

YOUR CAGING OF THOSE TWO HAS SOMEHOW TRIGGERED THEIR FELLOWS!

LOOK BEHIND YOU, FIREFLY!

NOW--ALL THE ALPHA PRIMITIVES HAVE RISEN--IN OPEN REBELLION!

DEATH! DEATH TO THE INHUMAN SCUM WHO HAVE ENSLAVED US! DEATH!

GOOD GRAVY! AND IF I REMEMBER WHAT KARNAK, HERE, TOLD ME ONCE--

--THEY OUTNUMBER US, JOHNNY STORM--NEARLY TWO TO ONE!

OUTNUMBERED, PERHAPS, FRIEND KARNAK-- BUT NEVER OUTFOUGHT, AS--

FIRST BLACK BOLT LASHES BACK--

THEN...

THE MUTANT GUEST

NAMED

PIETRO

a.k.a.:

QUICKSILVER!

...TILL EVEN SEA-SPAWNED TRITON PROVES...

...THAT NOBLE BLOOD AND WARRIOR TRAINING WILL OUT!

HAH! WE GOT'EM ON THE RUN ALREADY! THEY'RE FALLIN' BACK!

BUT-- WHERE TO?

THERE, TORCH! THE SUBTERRANEAN CATACOMBS WHICH ARE THEIR ORDAINED QUARTERS!

FOOM!

AND ONCE THEY'RE INSIDE, HERDED BY HAND AND HOOF ALIKE--

--IT BUT REMAINS FOR WORLD-SHATTERING KARNAK TO STRIKE A SINGLE BLOW AT THE PROPER POINT AT THE BASE OF THE ENTRANCE-WAY--

TAK!

--AND NO ALPHA PRIMITIVE SHALL EVER AGAIN SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY!

KUH-BLAM-LEE

DONE AND *BURIED!* YET, THEY SEEMED ALMOST *TOO WILLING* TO BE HERDED THUS,

DO I DETECT A NOTE OF *PITY?*

PITY--FOR THOSE WHO NEARLY *SLEW* ME?

DOMINOR IS *RIGHT!* THIS IS THE *SECOND* TIME THE ALPHAS HAVE RISEN AGAINST US WHO *BRED* THEM.

LET IT BE THE *LAST!*

LET THEM *STAY* IN THEIR SUN-LESS PRISON-- TILL THE *END OF TIME!*

I HOPE YOU FEEL THE *SAME,* PISKAS, WHEN *YOU* MUST SHOULDERTHE LOADS WHICH *THEY--*

EH? I NEARLY BACKED INTO-- *LOCKJAW.*

CRYSTAL'S *DOG!* BUT-- WHERE IS *SHE??*

FRZLL

SIRES! EARLIER, I SAW AN *ALPHA* CARRYING A *MOVING BURDEN*-- INTO THE *SHAFT!*

IF IT *WAS* CRYSTAL-- WE'LL *BLAST* OUR WAY IN TO HER!

CRYS!? WHY DIDN'T YOU *SPEAK UP*-- BEFORE THE SHAFT WAS *CLOSED?*

IT'LL TAKE *HOURS* TO MELT THRU THAT DEBRIS.

LOCKJAW! TAKE ME TO YOUR *MISTRESS*--BY *TELEPORTATION!*

DO YOU *HEAR* ME, LOCKJAW?

TAKE ME TO *CRYSTAL!*

THE BEAST *OBEYS!*

BOTH *VANISH*-- INTO THE VERY *RUBBLE.*

WELL, WHERE *JOHNNY STORM* DARES TO GO--

--THERE WILL *PIETRO* NEVER FEAR TO TREAD!

AND THEN-- THEY ARE GONE!

BLACK BOLT--I KNOW THE *TEMPESTS* WHICH NOW MUST RAGE ACROSS YOUR MIND;

WHETHER TO STRIVE TO *PURSUE* THE ALPHAS--*SAVE* OUR BELOVED CRYSTAL--

--OR BOW TO THE POPULAR *OUTCRY,* AND LET THE ALPHAS *ROT* FOREVER IN THEIR DARK DOMAIN.

WHICH SHALL IT *BE,* OUR COUSIN-- OUR *KING?*

HE *TURNS*-- AND *STRIDES AWAY!*

BLACK BOLT HAS *MADE* HIS CHOICE.

IN THE NAME OF *PEACE*, THE ALPHAS WILL GO *UNPUNISHED.*

THAT MEANS--*CRYSTAL* MUST *DIE!*

AND WE CAN DO *NOTHING*-- SAVE *ACQUIESCE* IN OUR MONARCH'S DECISION!

THERE ARE THOSE, HOWEVER, TO WHOM THE OMINOUS NON-WORDS OF BLACK BOLT ARE SOMEWHAT *LESS* THAN BINDING...!

GOOD BOY, LOCKJAW!

SO *THIS* IS THE *SUB-CITY* WHERE THE ALPHA PRIMITIVES HANG THEIR HATS, HUH?

AND THEIR *HEADS* AS WELL.

THEY ARE AN *ENSLAVED* RACE, BORN AND BRED TO *SERVE* THE INHUMANS--

--AND *FIT* FOR NOTHING MORE!

LOOK, BEFORE YOU START SHEDDIN' ANY *TEARS*--

--YOU *MIGHT* RECALL WE'RE HERE TO SAVE *CRYS* FROM YOUR PRECIOUS LITTLE PRIMITIVES!

YOU FLAMING *FOOL!* I NEED *NO* REMINDERS ABOUT THE DANGER TO THE *GIRL I LOVE!*

LOVE? *HAH!* AFTER A FEW CRUMMY *WEEKS?*

I DID NOT KNOW THERE WAS A *TIME LIMIT!*

LISTEN, SPEEDY--

NO! YOU SHALL LISTEN-- BOTH OF YOU!!

HUH? WHAT IN *BLAZES--?*

THE *WALL* BEHIND US-- *GLOWING--!*

THEN, BEFORE ANOTHER BEWILDERED **WORD** CAN BE SPOKEN -- WITH SOUL-STARTLING SUDDENNESS --

SMRAK!

SO! TWO **MORE** FOOLHARDY INTER-LOPERS DARE ENTER THE DARK DOMAIN OF THE **ALPHA PRIMITIVES!**

SOME KIND OF **GIANT**-- CRASHING **THRU!**

HE'S GOT **CRYS!** BUT **WHO**--?

EVEN **SLAVES** MAY HAVE **SLAVES,** OUTSIDER. **I** AM THAT OF THE **ALPHAS**--

--AND I AM-- **OMEGA!**

OMEGA!?

A WORD, OF COURSE, BETOKENING AN **END** -- WHICH IS PRECISELY WHAT YOUR PRECIOUS **BELOVED** SHALL MEET--

--UNLESS YOU BOTH **JOIN** ME--IN **BATTLE** AGAINST THE **INHUMANS!**

THEN-- WE'VE GOT **NO** CHOICE!

LEAD ON, BROTHER-- WE'RE ALL **YOURS!!**

NEXT: **"FOUR" AGAINST THE HIDDEN LAND!**

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ CC | 132 MAR 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

FIGHT ME! RESIST ME! YOU'LL BUT MAKE ME STRONGER-- EVER STRONGER!

--UNTIL AT LAST DESTROY YOU!!

OMEGA! THE ULTIMATE ASSASSIN!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

ROY THOMAS WRITER/EDITOR ✳ JOHN BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT /ARTISTS EXTRAORDINAIRE ✳ PETRA GOLDBERG, COLORIST JOHN COSTANZA, LETTERER

OMEGA! THE ULTIMATE ENEMY!

NO!! DON'T DO IT, OMEGA!

IF YOU DON'T HURT CRYSTAL, WE'LL PLAY IT YOUR WAY:

WE'LL HELP YOU CONQUER THE INHUMANS!

YOU ARE WISE, OUTSIDERS--BOTH OF YOU! FOR, I HAVE NOT THE SO-CALLED MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS IN ME.

ANY OTHER ANSWER FROM YOUR LIPS--AND I WOULD HAVE CRUSHED THE GIRL INTO LIFELESSNESS!

THE HUMAN TORCH SPEAKS FOR US BOTH, ANDROID!

"REVOLT IN PARADISE!"

THAT'S WHAT WE CALLED OUR LAST STAR-SPANGLED SAGA--AND WHY NOT, WHEN THE WORKER RACE KNOWN AS THE ALPHA PRIMITIVES REBELLED AGAINST THEIR MASTERS, THE UNCANNY INHUMANS, IN THE HEART OF THE HIDDEN LAND!

BUT NOW, IN PIT-DARK DEPTHS BENEATH THE GREAT REFUGE, JOHNNY STORM AND THE MUTANT QUICK-SILVER FACE--WELL, TURN THE PAGE AND TAKE A SQUINT FOR YOURSELF--!

12267

BOW BEFORE ME, SPINELESS SCUM THAT YOU ARE!

BOW BEFORE THE POWER THAT IS-- OMEGA!

NOT A CHANCE, GODZILLA, WE SAID WE'D SIGN UP FOR THE DURATION, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN--

WHOMP!

HEY! THAT WAS CLOSE!

NOW CUT THAT KINDA CRUD, MISTER--

--BEFORE I RAM OUR PROMISE DOWN YOUR SUBWAY-SIZE THROAT!

TORCH-- STOP! YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE--

OR-- PERHAPS HE DOES!

NOT EXPECTING SUCH RASHNESS, THE GIANT ANDROID REACTS IN SURPRISE--

--AND HE'S LOOSENED HIS GRIP ON CRYSTAL. I CAN TELL IT.

THEN, PERHAPS, IF I AM AT THAT RIGHT PLACE, AT THE RIGHT TIME--

KRANG!

THE RIGHT PLACE, PIETRO: THE HIMALAYA-HIDDEN CITY OF THE INHUMANS.

THE RIGHT TIME: JUST ABOUT NOW, AS--

HAH! I HAVE YOU, WITLESS ONE!

AND I HAVE CRYSTAL!

THE ANDROID'S ACTIONS SEEM STRANGELY ILL-COORDINATED.

YOU-- HELP ME!? THE FIRST TIME MY OWN FLAMES CAN'T--

:UNNNH!: TURNED ON THE JUICE-- AND NOTHING!

SAY NO MORE, TORCH. I'M COMING!

NO... USE, PIETRO! HE CAN'T... BE STOPPED, HE'S... THE PERSON-IFICATION... OF...

HOLD ON, JOHNNY STORM! I'LL TAKE CRYSTAL TO SAFETY, THEN RETURN TO HELP YOU.

MAYBE I'LL TAKE THAT HELPING HAND, AFTER ALL!

DON'T TRY TO SPEAK, MY DARLING. JUST REST--

PTHAK!

THOP!

FTAP!

-- AND LEAVE THE DRIVING TO US!

FPOP!

BUT, LATE-LEARNED AMERICAN SLOGANS WILL SCARCELY SUFFICE TO OVERCOME THE SHEER SIZE AND STRENGTH OF THE MYSTERIOUS BEING CALLED OMEGA--

AND SO, IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED--

THEN TRY--

STAGGERED HIM A BIT THAT TIME!

PERHAPS, IF I CAN HOLD OUT-- JUST ONCE OR TWICE MORE--!

PHTOW!

TRY--

JOHNNY! PIETRO! YOU WERE FIGHTING EACH OTHER BEFORE-- THINKING SOMEHOW THAT WOULD DECIDE WHICH OF YOU I LOVED--

BUT, IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO EITHER OF YOU, I--

--AGAIN!!

THAT DID IT!

KEB--

THANKS, TOM SWIFT!

THAT' GUY'S GOT A GRIP THAT'D DO CHARLES ATLAS PROUD.

YOU OKAY, CRYS BABY?

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE UP FOR IT, BUT DO YOU THINK MAYBE YOUR ELEMENTAL POWERS COULD--?

JUST NOW, FEW THINGS WOULD PLEASE ME MORE, JOHNNY.

I HAVE POWER OVER THE FOUR TRADITIONAL "ELEMENTS" OF EARTH, AIR, FIRE, AND WATER--

SZZZLL

BUT, AS YOU CAN PLAINLY SEE--

OMEGA STRIDES THRU THE FLAMES I CAN CAUSE TO SPRING UP IN HIS PATH-- SEEMS EVEN TO ABSORB THEM-- GROW LARGER FROM THEM--!

HE GROWS *AGAIN*, WHEN I GENERATE *SEISMIC SHOCKS* IN THE VERY GROUND HE TREADS --

RRMMMMM

--AND *AGAIN*, WHEN BUFFETED BY *HURRICANE WINDS!*

I'M SURE A *TIDAL WAVE* WOULD MERELY ADD EVEN *MORE* TO HIS STATURE.

WOOOOSH

WE GET THE GENERAL *IDEA*, CRYS.

BUT, WHAT ENERGY DID HE ABSORB FROM *YOUR* ATTACK, GIRL--

--THAT WAS NOT PRESENT IN *MY* BLOWS, OR IN THE FLAMES OF THE *TORCH?*

YEAH, WHAT *ABOUT* THAT, LADY?

I'M-- NOT *SURE*, BUT I--

LOOK!

EVEN NOW, THE *ALPHA PRIMITIVES* JOIN OMEGA FOR THE *KILL*--AS IF AWARE OF OUR *HELPLESS-NESS!*

WE STAND *NO CHANCE* AGAINST THEM *ALL!!*

AND, ON *THAT* CHEERY LITTLE NOTE:

LET'S JUMP AN EQUAL SPACE *ABOVE* GROUND, WHERE A COMMANDEERED *FLYING WING* IS SWOOPING DOWN TOWARD THE HIDDEN LAND...

ONLY TROUBLE IS, IT'S SWOOPING FAR, FAR--

--*TOO FAST!* AND, FOR SOME REASON, NO ONE *INSIDE* HAS RESPONDED TO MY CALL BY *OPENING* THE GREAT DOME.

WE'LL CRASH *INTO* IT, UNLESS--

I *TOL'* YOU YA SHOULDA LET *ME* PILOT THIS CRATE, REED.

AFTER ALL, *I'M* THE ONE USETA BE A JET-JOCKEY FOR A *LIVIN'!*

THIS IS NO TIME FOR *RECRIMIN-ATIONS*, BEN.

LOOK! THE *DOME'S* OPENING AT LAST-- JUST IN *TIME--!*

THEN WHY DONTCHA *SLOW DOWN*, BIG-WORDS, BEFORE--?

THAT'S JUST IT, BEN. I *CAN'T!*

THE CONTROLS WON'T RESPOND!!

THEY WON'T, HUH?

SOUNDS TA ME LIKE A COP-OUT FER BEIN' A LOUSY PILOT.

JUST THE SAME, IF THE CONTROLS WON'T RESPOND--

--THEN OL' BENJY WILL--

--BY BANGIN' A KING-SIZE HOLE IN THE BOTTOM OF A FEW MILLION BUCKS WORTH OF AIRPLANE--

SKRAK!

--TA SEE IF GRABBIN' THIS TOWER WON'T SLOW US DOWN ENOUGH TA LAND!

RRUTTCH

IT WORKED, BEN -- THOUGH I'D BET MY Ph.D. THAT WHAT YOU JUST DID VIOLATED EVERY KNOWN LAW OF AERIAL DYNAMICS!

SO LET'EM SUE ME!

REED! BEN! I JUST REALIZED -- LOOK AT THE STREETS OUTSIDE!

THEY'RE -- DESERTED! WHAT'S HAPPENED TO MY FELLOW INHUMANS?!?

AW, DON'T GET YER BRAIDS IN AN UPROAR, RED!

HERE COMES YER WHOLE FAMILY OUTTA HIDIN', LIKE SO MANY MUNCHKINS.

IT WAS MEDUSA AND OUR OTHER FRIENDS, GORGON -- JUST AS I SUSPECTED.

THEN, THANK AGON I OPENED THE GREAT DOME AT THE LAST SECOND.

...OUR DEEPEST APOLOGIES, COUSIN.

DUE TO RECENT DISTRACTIONS, NO ONE WAS THERE TO RECEIVE YOUR LANDING REQUEST.

DISTRACTIONS? AND -- WHERE IS BLACK BOLT?

HERE HE COMES.

BLACK BOLT GESTURES TOWARD THE VAST CATACOMBS WHICH HOUSE THE ALPHA PRIMITIVES.

BUT -- WHY IS THE ENTRANCE-WAY TO THEM IN RUINS?

I WILL EXPLAIN, MEDUSA... SINCE OUR KING'S MEREST WHISPER CAN CAUSE THE MOUNTAINS THEMSELVES TO TREMBLE.

IT ALL BEGAN AND ENDED HOURS AGO...

...AND THE GREAT REFUGE WILL NEVER AGAIN BE THE SAME...!

"FROM DOCILE WORKERS, BORN AND BRED FOR MILLENNIA TO THEIR SIMPLE LIVES AND MENIALS TASKS--

"-- THE ALPHA PRIMITIVES SUDDENLY BECAME A FIERCE PRIDE OF RAMPAGING LIONS--

"NO-- WORSE THAN THAT: THEY BECAME AN ARMY OF RELENTLESS ANTS, WITH NO THOUGHT FOR INDIVIDUAL SAFETY, NO RELUCTANCE TO SACRIFICE INFINITE NUMBERS --

"--TO DESTROY THEIR MASTERS, AND TAKE COMMAND OF THE HIDDEN LAND!

"FORTUNATELY, WE DEFEATED THEM -- DROVE THEM BACK, THEN IMPRISONED THEM IN THEIR SUBTERRANEAN LABYRINTH.

"YET, WHEN IT WAS LEARNED THAT CRYSTAL HAD BEEN TAKEN BY THEM, JOHNNY STORM AND QUICKSILVER RECKLESSLY PURSUED THEM --

"--AIDED BY THE TELEPORTATIONAL PROWESS OF LOCKJAW--

"-- AND SUSTAINED BY THE LOVE WHICH EACH BEARS FOR OUR FAIR COUSIN!

"FOR OURSELVES, WE SOUGHT SOME CLUE TO THE UPRISING, EVEN VISITED THE CELL OF OUR SOVEREIGN'S BROTHER, MAXIMUS THE MAD--

"BUT HE DOES NAUGHT THESE DAYS, SAVE TINKER WITH A HARMLESS ATTEMPT AT A PERPETUAL MOTION DEVICE...

"...AND PROCLAIMED, FOR ONCE, A RARE AND UNACCUSTOMED INNOCENCE!

AND NOW, TRITON?

AND NOW WE WAIT, MEDUSA-- WAIT AND DO NOTHING--

FOR BLACK BOLT HAS SADLY CHOSEN THE WISER, YET HARDER OF TWO ROADS.

AND, THAT NO MORE INHUMAN BLOOD MAY BE SHED, WE DO NOT PURSUE OUR REBELLIOUS SERVANTS, BUT LET THEM DEPART IN PEACE

...AND AWAIT, WE HOPE, THE RETURN OF PIETRO AND THE HUMAN TORCH.

CORRECTION, FROG-FACE...

MEBBE THAT'S WHAT *YOU* DO.

ME, I GOT A FEW IDEAS OF MY *OWN!*

BEN GRIMM-- *NO!* BLACK BOLT HAS *DECREED*--

YEAH? WELL, HE'S *YOUR* KING, BABY-- NOT *MINE!*

I'M MORE THE *SIMPLE, DIRECT* TYPE, SO I'M JUST GONNA--

WHAT *IN THE--?*

THOOM!

KEEP BACK, ALL! THE DEBRIS IS *EXPLODING*-- *OUTWARD!*

AND THERE, THRU THE GAPING APERTURE, POUR THE *ALPHA* HORDES--

-- ABOUT THE ANKLES OF SOME *COLOSSUS FROM HELL!*

KARNAK-- THAT *SYMBOL* ON THE GIANT'S CHEST--

THE GREEK LETTER *OMEGA*-- AS IF HE WERE SOMEHOW THE *END-PRODUCT* OF ALL THE *ALPHAS--!*

BUT HOW CAN SUCH A THING *BE?*

GORGON! *KARNAK!* BLACK BOLT GIVES THE SIGN FOR THE OTHERS TO *STAND BACK.*

WE OF THE *ROYAL HOUSE* SHALL STRIKE *FIRST* FOR THE GREAT REFUGE!

GORGON *ANSWERS,* COUSIN...

...WITH HAMMERING *HOOF!*

AND *KARNAK,* AS WELL--

--WITH THE MOST *SHATTERING* BLOW I'VE STRUCK IN *MANY A DAY!*

KRAK

IMPOSSIBLE! HE STANDS-- *UNFAZED!*

IF *THAT* IS THE EXTENT OF YOUR POWERS, INHUMANS--

--THEN THE *DESTINY* OF THE ALPHA PRIMITIVES IS WRITTEN IN THE *STARS* THIS NIGHT--

--AYE, IN STARS MOST FRIENDLY!!

TCHK!

MERCILESSLY, THE MAMMOTH FOOT **STABS** DOWNWARD, ONLY MOMENTARILY **STAYED** BY KARNAK'S DESPERATE CHOPS--

YET, THAT FLEETING MOMENT IS LONG ENOUGH...

...AS THE INHUMANS' MIGHTY **MONARCH** THROWS CAUTION TO THE WINDS, AND SENDS A SHARP, WELL-DIRECTED THRUST OF NIGH-SENTIENT **SOUND** THRU THE NIGHT AIR...

...TO TOPPLE THE OFF-BALANCE BEHEMOTH!

FOOLS! SUCH ACTS WILL GAIN YOU **NOTHING!**

NOTHING, MONSTER, SAVE **TIME**--

AND **TIME,** DEAR COUSIN, IS THE **FRIEND** OF THOSE WHO USE HER **WISELY.**

PHILOSOPHIC WORDS, GORGON...!

MY **PARDON,** KARNAK. I DID NOT MEAN TO **INTRUDE** UPON YOUR CHOSEN SPHERE OF LEARNING...

RATHER, I'LL RESORT **INSTEAD**...

...TO THE MORE **PHYSICAL** APPROACH WHICH IS MY **FORTE!**

WHAM

BUT--BY THE AWESOME GENES OF **AGON**--ALREADY THE **GIANT** ARISES ANEW!

LARGER--EVEN MORE **FORMIDABLE** THAN BEFORE!

HOW FORMIDABLE, INHUMANS, EVEN **YOU** CAN SCARCELY GUESS!!

BUT, YOU SOON SHALL LEARN, AND THEN-- WHO??

ACTUALLY, HIGH-POCKETS, I AIN'T SO MUCH A WHO--

--AS I AM A WHAT!

THE EVER-LOVIN', BLUE-EYED THING, TA BE PRECISE!

NOW, TELL ME WHAT YA DID WITH THE TORCH-- AN' WITH CRYSTAL--

--BEFORE YA FORCE ME TA GET VIOLENT!

ANSWER ME, BLAST YOU!

I SAID--

ANSWER ME!!

:ULLP!:

SOMEHOW, I THINK I'M GONNA LIVE TA REGRET GETTIN' SO CLOSE TO THIS BOZO--

--IF I'M GONNA LIVE AT ALL--

THRAKK!

--WHICH DON'T SEEM VERY LIKELY!!

BEN!

ALL THOSE TONS OF DEBRIS-- HE'LL BE BURIED BENEATH IT WHEN HE FALLS-- KILLED, UNLESS I CAN--

SKRAASH!!

GOT HIM-- JUST IN THE PROVERBIAL NICK!

BEN--BEN, OLD FRIEND-- ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO YOU--I'D NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF!

SHEESH!

I HADA-- STAY CONSCIOUS-- JUST TA HEAR A LINE LIKE THAT!?

THEN-- YOU AREN'T HURT!?

WELL--I WOULDN'T PUT IT THAT WAY--

BUT, IF YA MEAN WILL I LIVE TA PLAY THE HARMONICA-AN'-SPOONS AGAIN, WHY--

HEY! AIN'TCHA INTERESTED NO MORE, NOW THAT I AIN'T ON MY DEATH-BED?

LISTEN, BEN! CAN YOU HEAR?

DO YOU SEE??

IT'S THE REST OF THE INHUMANS--

--DISOBEYING BLACK BOLT'S COMMAND-- AND COMING FORTH TO DO BATTLE!

AN' THE WAY THINGS BEEN GOIN' SO FAR, THEY AIN'T A MOMENT TOO SOON!

ONWARD, BROTHERS! ONWARD AGAINST THE COMMON FOE!

DEATH TO THE TRAITOROUS ALPHAS--

--AND TO THE FILTH THEY'VE DRAGGED UP WITH THEM!!

THEN, AS RENEWED, REVITALIZED HOSTILITIES BREAK OUT, A CALM AND SCIENTIFIC EYE NOTICES--

MAXIMUS' PERPETUAL MOTION MACHINE--THAT MUST BE IT!

AN IMPOSSIBILITY--THAT ONLY A MADMAN COULD BELIEVE IN--AND YET--

COULD IT BE?

COULD IT JUST POSSIBLY BE--?

BELOW--THE TOWER WHEREIN BLACK BOLT'S BROTHER HAS OFTEN BEEN IMPRISONED!

IF THE QUESTIONS THAT ARE TORMENTING ME HAVE AN ANSWER--I MAY FIND IT HERE!

HAH! THAT'S IT, INHUMANS! ATTACK! STRIKE BACK AT OMEGA WITH ALL THE PENT-UP FURY AT YOUR COMMAND!

HE'LL BUT GET STRONGER--TILL ALL THE GREAT REFUGE CANNOT STAND AGAINST HIM!

YOU'LL NEVER KNOW WILL YOU--?

--NEVER KNOW THAT MY "CRACK-POT MACHINE" IS AT THE ROOT OF IT ALL--

--AYE, THE VERY ROOT--THOUGH FED BY UNGUESSED WATERS!

I DON'T UNDERSTAND ALL OF THAT, MAXIMUS--

BUT I THINK I'VE HEARD ENOUGH--FOR NOW!

YOU! WHY, I'LL--

NOT TODAY, FRIEND.

BEN! MEDUSA! FOLLOW ME--QUICKLY!

WE'VE GOT TO DESTROY THAT MACHINE OF MAXIMUS'--BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

HUH? FIRST YOU FADE AWAY INTO THE SUNSET--

--THEN YOU COME BACK SPOUTIN' ORDERS!?

WELL, I AIN'T ONE TA KICK A GIFT HORSE IN THE TEETH,

SO I'LL JUST TOTAL THIS GIZMO INSTEAD!

THAT OMEGA CREEP IS UP TO HIS ELBOWS IN INHUMANS--

DO IT, BEN! DO IT!!

LOOK, JUST LEMME DO IT MY WAY, AWRIGHT?

OKAY, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS--IT'S CLOB--

YEEOW!

FOOOSH

HEY! THAT WAS THE TORCH WHO BLAMED NEAR SINGED MY DELICATE PINKIES!

AND NOW CRYSTAL'S PUTTIN' UP A FIRE-WALL BETWEEN ME AN' THAT GADGET!

THE MUTANT QUICKSILVER IS WITH THEM!

MEDUSA-- LET ME GO! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!

AND I WON'T RELEASE YOU, DEAR COUSIN-- UNTIL I DO!

ET TU, PIETRO?

:MMMFF!:

SHAKESPEARIAN QUOTES WON'T STOP HIM. GOT TO TRY MORE DIRECT METHODS.

DIRECT METHODS, REED?

DO YOU MEAN-- LIKE SO?

OWWCH! I'LL WASTE YA, HOTHEAD, WHEN I--

FRZZ

AT LEAST YOU WON'T WASTE OMEGA--

--AND THAT'S WHAT COUNTS!!

:UNNH!: YOU ARE STRONGER THAN YOU LOOK, RICHARDS.

THANKS-- FOR THAT, ANYWAY--!

NO NEED! THAT MERELY MEANS I MUST KEEP RACING EVER FASTER TO KEEP YOU OFF BALANCE.

FASTER-- FASTER--!

BUT, EVEN A SUPER-SPEED MUTANT CAN SOMETIMES FORGET TO LOOK PRECISELY WHERE HE IS GOING--

AND SO, HE NEVER SEES-- TILL MUCH TOO LATE--

FR-AM!

-- THAT HE WAS ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH THE HUMAN TORCH!

PIETRO!

IF HE'S HURT-- IF ANYTHING'S HAPPENED TO HIM--!

THEY'RE JUST STUNNED, CRYSTAL-- PIETRO AND JOHNNY!

BUT THEIR CRACK-UP GAVE ME A MOMENT TO THINK-- TO UNRAVEL BOTH MYSELF --AND THIS MYSTERY.

WHAT MYSTERY, BIG-WORDS?

THE ONE WE NEVER GAVE THE KIDS A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN, BEN. LOOK AROUND YOU--

"LOOK AT THE **SAVAGERY** WITH WHICH THE AROUSED **INHUMANS** FIGHT BACK AGAINST THE UNARMED **ALPHA PRIMITIVE** HORDE...

"**THEIRS** IS SUPERIORITY OF WEAPONRY, OF **FIREPOWER**-- AND THEY BLAST **ALPHA** AFTER **ALPHA** INTO FREE-FLYING ATOMS...

"YET, WITH EACH NEW **BURST**-- EVERY FLASH OF CYCLOTRONIC **DEATH** INFLICTED UPON THE REBELLING WORKER-RACE...

"...THE MONSTER CALLED **OMEGA** GLOWS MORE BRIGHTLY-- AND GROWS EVEN **LARGER**...

"...TILL IT SEEMS THAT **NOTHING** CAN STOP HIM!

THERE'S ONLY **ONE** POSSIBLE ANSWER-- AND I'M A **FOOL** FOR NOT GUESSING IT **BEFORE!**

YOU SAID IT, LEADER-MAN... **I** DIDN'T.

WE COULDN'T TAKE THE TIME TO **TELL** YOU--

--'CAUSE WE COULDN'T RISK YOUR DESTROYING THAT **MACHINE!**

YES-- I **SEE** THAT NOW.

MEBBE **YOU** SEE IT, STRETCHO-- BUT **I'M** STILL IN THE DARK. HOWZABOUT--?

THERE'S NO **TIME!**

Y'KNOW, SOME-HOW I KINDA **THOUGHT** THAT'S WHAT YOU'D SAY.

JUST **WAIT** UP, HUH?

BUT, THERE ARE **SOME** THINGS WHICH A MAN WHOM COSMIC ACCIDENT HAS MADE A **HUMAN RUBBER-BAND** CAN DO BEST FOR **HIMSELF**...

AND THIS, IT SEEMS, IS **ONE** OF THEM.

INHUMANS-- STOP! THIS IS A BATTLE YOU **CANNOT-- SHOULD NOT WIN!**

LISTEN TO ME-- AND ALL THE BLOOD-LETTING CAN COME TO AN **END!**

BLACK BOLT GIVES THE SIGN THAT WE SHOULD **HEED** THIS TRUSTED OUTLANDER.

DONE, THEN! WE'LL GIVE HIM HIS SAY-- IF THE **REBELS** AND THEIR **MONSTER** OBEY THE TRUCE, AS WELL!

AND NOW, AN EERIE SILENCE BATHES THIS HIDDEN LAND, WHERE LATE HAS ECHOED THE SOUNDS OF SAVAGERY AND OF SLAUGHTER...

A SILENCE WHICH TAKES ITS CUE FROM BLACK BOLT AND HIS HIGH-BORN COUSINS...

...YET EXTENDS AS WELL TO INHUMANS OF EVERY STRIPE AND SENSITIVITY...

...TO THE COOKIE-CUTTER FORMS AND FACES OF THE ALPHA PRIMITIVES...

...AND EVEN TO THAT MYSTERIOUS, HULKING GROTESQUERIE WHICH HAS CALLED ITSELF... OMEGA!

THAT'S BETTER! BUT IT'S REALLY CRYSTAL I WANT YOU TO HEAR.

WHILE A CAPTIVE, HER ELEMENTAL POWERS SOMEHOW ATTUNED HER TO OMEGA'S MENTAL WAVES-- AND SHE LEARNED THE SECRET OF HIS STRENGTH, HIS GROWTH, HIS VERY EXISTENCE!

SOMETHING EVEN YOU ALPHAS DO NOT KNOW!

AND WHAT I'VE LEARNED HAS MADE ME... ASHAMED!

FOR THE TRUE CREATORS OF OMEGA -- THOSE WHO GAVE HIM THE POWER TO LAY WASTE THIS LAND WHICH HAD BEEN HOME TO EVERYONE HERE...

...ARE NOT THE REBELLING ALPHAS...

...BUT WE INHUMANS OURSELVES!

WHAT INSANITY DOES THE GIRL SPEAK?

NO MADNESS, JUST THE SAD, SAD TRUTH.

IN ONE SENSE, IT WAS MAXIMUS' DOING. HE INVENTED A MACHINE WHICH EMITTED NO RAYS--

--BUT RATHER ABSORBED--HARNESSED OUR SECRET GUILT-- OUR KNOWLEDGE THAT WE WERE OPPRESSORS ALL!

--AND MADE THAT GUILT MANIFEST IN OMEGA!

THEN-- IT'S MAXIMUS WHO'S AT FAULT HERE! THE TRAITOR!

NAY, KARNAK, WE CREATED THE ALPHAS-- TO BE OUR SLAVES, OUR ETERNAL INFERIORS-- DELIBERATELY LESS HUMAN THAN WE.

MAXIMUS MERELY TURNED OUR OWN FAULTS AGAINST US.

EACH PARTICLE OF RACIAL HATRED WITHIN US BECAME AN ACTION DIRECTED AGAINST OMEGA-- WHICH IN TURN BUT FED HIM, MADE HIM STRONGER.

AND THERE MUST BE MUCH HATRED WITHIN US, FRIENDS--

FOR IS HE NOT HUGE?

AWARENESS WASHES OVER THE GATHERED INHUMANS NOW... SWAMPS THEM, OVERWHELMS THEM IN WAVES OF TIDAL INTENSITY.

THEY SENSE THE PATTERN: THAT IT WAS NOT OMEGA THEY WERE TRULY FIGHTING, BUT THEMSELVES--

--A RACE WHICH HAD EXTENDED NOT A HELPING HAND TO THE ALPHAS-- BUT A CHAIN, INSTEAD.

AND THE INHUMANS LOOK AT OMEGA...

...AND AT EACH OTHER...

...THEN AT OMEGA AGAIN...

AND HE REALLY DOES RESEMBLE THEM, AFTER ALL.

SO THEY TURN, A PEOPLE WHO CAN NO LONGER DENY THEIR COLLECTIVE GUILT--

-- CAN NO LONGER REVEL IN VAUNTED SUPERIORITY TO THE MOST IMPERFECT HUMANS IN THE WORLD OUTSIDE.

WHILE THE ALPHAS, FREE MEN NOW, RETURN TO THEIR NIGHTED CATACOMBS... THEIR OWN WORLD... DARK, BUT THEIRS NO LESS FOR THAT.

ONE DAY, THEY'LL COME AGAIN INTO THE LIGHT, AND TAKE A PROFFERED BROTHER'S HAND.

ONE DAY... BUT NOT TODAY.

AND OMEGA?

MOTIONLESS HE STANDS NOW: EMBODIMENT OF HATRED, AND MONUMENT TO RACIAL GUILT.

HE'S POWERLESS NOW, BUT IF EVER THE INHUMANS FORGET THE LESSON THEY HAVE LEARNED THIS DAY...

...IF EVER THEY SEEK TO ELEVATE THEMSELVES BY TRAMPLING OTHERS IN THE MUD...

...IN THAT HOUR, OMEGA WALKS AGAIN!

EPILOGUE: THE NEXT DAY, AT A PUBLIC CEREMONY, THREE OUTSIDERS ARE HONORED BY THE GREAT REFUGE...

WE'RE, UH, FLATTERED MEDUSA...

BUT WHY DID YOU ASK US TO APPEAR IN THESE TORN UNIFORMS?

FOR A VERY SPECIAL REASON:

YOU THREE, NO LESS THAN CRYSTAL, HAVE HELPED BRING PEACE TO THIS TROUBLED LAND.

AND, EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN PEACE...YOU HAVE BROUGHT PERHAPS THE BEGINNING OF UNDERSTANDING.

OUR REWARD IS MEAGRE, BECAUSE WE KNOW YOU WOULD ACCEPT NO MORE...

BUT THIS ELECTRO-WEAVE DEVICE WILL REPAIR YOUR TATTERED GARMENTS, IF YOU BUT WILL IT TO.

BEN GRIMM...!?

DO IT TO IT, GRUESOME.

I PASS.

I AIN'T GOT ENUFF OF A COSTUME TA GIT TATTERED.

VERY WELL THEN. I SHALL DEMONSTRATE THE USES OF THE ELECTRO-WEAVE.

YOU, MEDUSA?

YES. I.

GORGON...IF YOU PLEASE...

SZZZFF

WH--? YOUR WHOLE OUTFIT'S CHANGED-- INTO A CUSTOMIZED VARIANT OF AN F.F. UNIFORM!

BUT-- WHY??

BECAUSE, REED RICHARDS, BLACK BOLT WISHES ME TO VISIT THE OUTER WORLD FOR A TIME, AS HIS SPECIAL EMISSARY...

...TO LEARN THE BEST TIME AND WAY TO REVEAL TO IT OUR EXISTENCE.

AND WHAT BETTER WAY TO VISIT YOUR WORLD-- TO WHOSE POLLUTION I HAVE APPARENTLY DEVELOPED AN IMMUNITY-- THAN THIS?

NAMELY, BY REPLACING YOUR ESTRANGED WIFE IN THE FANTASTIC FOUR-- UNTIL SUCH TIME AS SHE RETURNS!

WELL? AM I ACCEPTED, AT LEAST FOR THE DURATION?

ACCEPTED! THOUGH I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND IF I HOPE THAT "DURATION" ISN'T TOO LONG.

IT WON'T BE, REED. I DON'T HAVE ANY CRAZY SISTERS.

NOW-- LEMME AT THAT ELECTRO-WEAVE GIZMO!

YOU MAY FIRE WHEN READY, GORGON!

SSTZZZ

THE COLORS IN HIS UNIFORM--

THEY'RE CHANGING -- GROWING BRIGHTER--!

HEY! THEM THREADS RING SOME KINDA BELL, MATCH-HEAD, BUT I--

THEY OUGHT TO, BENJY-BABY.

WHEN I WAS A KID, I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE THE ORIGINAL HUMAN TORCH-- THE ONE I READ ABOUT IN THOSE SECOND-HAND COMIC-BOOKS.*

HE HAD A RED-AND-GOLD COSTUME-- SO PRESTO!

* AND SO HAVE YOU, IF YOU'VE READ SOME OF THE RAPTUROUS REPRINTINGS OF SAME OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS-- NOT TO MENTION F.F. ANNUAL #4!
--REMINISCIN' ROY.

SAY, REED, I JUST THOUGHT OF SOMETHING.

MY LOVE FOR THE FIRST TORCH--DO YOU THINK THAT'S WHY THOSE COSMIC RAYS TURNED ME INTO ONE, TOO?

IT'S ALL TOO DEEP FOR ME, SON.

BESIDES, I HATE TO ADMIT WHAT THAT SAYS ABOUT MY EARLY READING HABITS.

WONDER WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MY UNIFORM!?

WELL, NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT FOR FINDING OUT...!

ZZZ

NUTHIN'.

AT LEAST THE DEVICE *REPAIRED* HIS CLOTHES, BEN.

FACE IT, BIG-WORDS, IT'S OBVIOUS YOU JUST AIN'T GOT NO *IMAGINATION*. NOW IF *I'D*--

THE *MAIN* THING IS, WE LOOK LIKE A *TEAM* AGAIN!

I'M-- GLAD TO HEAR YOU *SAY* THAT, JOHNNY...

--BECAUSE THAT MEANS YOU TOOK OUR LITTLE *TALK* LAST NIGHT TO *HEART*.

AND THAT MEANS THERE *IS* A FANTASTIC FOUR AGAIN--

YOU, AND BEN, AND ME, AND-- *MEDUSA!*

REED RICHARDS SMILES, AND TRIES NOT TO THINK OF *SUE*... THE WOMAN HE *LOVES*...

...THE WOMAN WHO TOOK HIS *CHILD*, AND WALKED OUT OF HIS LIFE.

WHILE, ON A BALCONY OVERLOOKING THE GRANDIOSE CEREMONY, THERE BROODS *ANOTHER*, WHO DOES *NOT* TRY TO MASK HIS FEELINGS.

PIETRO, CALLED *QUICKSILVER*, OBSERVES THE EASY COMRADESHIP OF HUMAN AND INHUMAN... THAT COMRADESHIP WHICH HAS ALWAYS COME SO *HARD* TO HIM...

HE WONDERS WHY *CRYSTAL* IS NOT HERE AT HIS SIDE TO *SHARE* THE VIEW.

AND THEN, A MERE MOMENT *LATER*...

...HE FEARS HE KNOWS.

JOHNNY! MAY I-- SPEAK WITH YOU FOR A MINUTE, PLEASE?

SURE, CRYS.

DON'T TAKE TOO LONG, OKAY, KID? WE GOTTA GIT BACK HOME.

...I JUST HAD TO SEE YOU BEFORE YOU LEFT, JOHNNY. I COULDN'T LET IT JUST...END LIKE THIS.

I TOLD YOU I'D CHOOSE BY TODAY-- AND I HAVE.

OKAY, SO WHAT'S THE VERDICT?

MY FRIENDS ARE WAITING FOR ME.

P-PLEASE, JOHNNY-- DEAR JOHNNY-- DON'T MAKE THIS ANY HARDER FOR ME THAN IT ALREADY IS.

WE'VE MEANT SO MUCH TO EACH OTHER... EVER SINCE THAT DAY WE MET, IN THE DESOLATE RUBBLE OF A BIG CITY...

BUT...?

THOSE ARE MEMORIES, JOHNNY. MEMORIES I'LL CARRY WITH ME TILL THE DAY I DIE.

BUT... SOMEHOW... IT'S JUST NOT THERE ANY MORE, JOHNNY.

IT'S PIETRO I LOVE NOW-- AND I'LL BE STAYING HERE WITH HIM.

I NEVER THOUGHT YOU WOULDN'T.

MATTER OF FACT, I'M SORTA GLAD IT HAPPENED THIS WAY, NOW THAT I'VE HAD TIME TO COOL DOWN AND THINK THINGS THRU.

WE'VE BEEN APART TOO LONG-- AND LIKE YOU SAID, IT JUST ISN'T THERE ANYMORE-- FOR EITHER OF US.

ACTUALLY, I'M KINDA LOOKING FORWARD TO GETTIN' BACK IN CIRCULATION AGAIN.

TRUTH IS, I'VE EVEN GOT A LONG-STANDING DATE TONIGHT-- WITH AN OLD GIRLFRIEND, DORRIE EVANS.

OH, JOHNNY... YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO HEAR YOU SAY THAT!

I COULDN'T HAVE STOOD IT, IF YOU'D BEEN SAD-- OR BITTER. I JUST COULDN'T!

WELL, THERE'S PIETRO. I HAVEN'T TOLD HIM YET, AND I GUESS... I SHOULD.

GOOD-BYE, JOHNNY.

AS THEY SAY IN *YOUR* WORLD... I'LL SEE YOU *AROUND.*

YEAH...

LIKE THE MAN *SAID*...

...I'LL BE *SEEING* YOU.

WELL, FIREFLY? YOU COMIN', OR *AINTCHA?*

WE BEEN HERE LONG ENUFF FOR *DOC DOOM* TA MAYBE HAVE CONQUERED THE WHOLE BLAMED *WORLD.*

HEY--WHEN WE GET *BACK* TONIGHT, YOU WANNA GO TAKE IN "*THE GODFATHER*" AGAIN?

OR HAVE YA GOT SOMETHIN' *SHAKIN'*?

NO. NOTHING SHAKING, BEN.

NOTHING AT ALL.

NEXT: THE THING VS. THUNDRA!

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP™
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
20¢ CC
133 APR 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIX MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

™

YOU STRUGGLE IN VAIN, THING! WHAT HOPE CAN A PUNY MAN HAVE AGAINST--
THE POWER OF THUNDRA!
THIS IS IT! THE BATTLE OF THE CENTURY-- ANY CENTURY!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

GERRY CONWAY, SCRIPTER / RAMONA FRADON, GUEST ARTIST / JOE SINNOTT, INKER / LETTERED BY: JOHN COSTANZA / COLORED BY: STAN GOLDBERG / PLOTTED AND EDITED BY: ROY THOMAS

THUNDRA at DAWN!

HAPPY NEW YEAR
SWELL BUNCHA JOKERS WE ARE.
IT'S ALMOST MIDNIGHT ON NEW YEAR'S EVE-- WE'RE IN TIMES SQUARE-- AN' BETWEEN THE FIVE OF US, WE CAN'T CRACK ONE CRUMMY SMILE.
GREAT IDEA YA HAD, STRETCHO. ALMOST WISH I'D STAYED HOME AN' WATCHED GUY LOMBARDO ON THE TUBE.
42 ST.
TIMES SQ
YEAH... ALMOST.
HAPPY NEW
BEFORE THE EVENING'S OUT, YOU MIGHT REPEAT THAT WISH, BEN GRIMM.
THOUGH THINGS SEEM A BIT DOMESTIC RIGHT NOW, THERE'S DISASTER IN THE CARDS ...AND FRIEND, THAT'S AN UNDERSTATEMENT--!

WE'RE LIKE A GANG OF *UNDERTAKERS...*

...'CEPT *YOU,* ALICIA. AND YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WITH *REAL* PROBLEMS...

BECAUSE I'M *BLIND,* BEN?

THAT'S NO PROBLEM...WHEN *YOU'RE* MY EYES.

AIN'T MUCH *GOOD* AT THAT, AM I?

I'M SUPPOSED TA BE TELLIN' YA WHAT'S *HAPPENING*-- AND HERE I GO PLAYIN' *GLOOMY GUS.*

TIMES SQ.

SORRY, KID... THAT'S WHAT YA GET FOR HANGIN' AROUND THE *THING.*

OND

I'M WITH YOU BECAUSE I *WANT* TO BE.

I CARE ABOUT *YOU...* NOT YOUR *MOODS.*

HAPPY NEW YEAR

HAVE A *BALLOON,* KID...

ON ME, THEY LOOK KINDA *FUNNY.*

HAPPY NEW YEAR

BEN, DON'T *TALK* LIKE THAT.

HARSH HUMOR: IT'S JUST ONE METHOD OF COPING WITH PAIN.

AND WHAT OF THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THIS SOMBER QUINTET? WHAT OF REED RICHARDS, FOR EXAMPLE--?

RICHARDS, WHOSE WIFE HAS LEFT HIM, TAKING THEIR CHILD--

HAPPI NE W AR

--RICHARDS, WHO STANDS IN A SEA OF JOYFUL HUMANITY-- AND FIGHTS TO REMAIN AN ISLE.

DON'T TRY TO *CHEER* ME, MEDUSA.

FROM WHERE *I* STAND-- THERE HASN'T BEEN MUCH GOOD IN *1972*--

42

MES SQ

--AND THERE'S NOT LIKELY TO BE MUCH *MORE* IN '73.

SO *THIS* IS THE BRILLIANT *REED RICHARDS*? THE YOUNGEST *INHUMAN* SHOWS GREATER MATURITY THAN *YOU* HAVE--!

YOU, ONE OF MANKIND'S FINEST *MINDS*--

--OVERCOME WITH CHILDISH *SELF-PITY*!

SHE'S *RIGHT*, JOHNNY-- WE'VE *ALL* BEEN TOO WITHDRAWN.

IN ANOTHER MINUTE WE'LL HIT THE *NEW YEAR*-- NEW BEGINNINGS-- PERHAPS A NEW *LIFE*.

SURE, REED--

I JUST WISH I COULD BE CERTAIN IT'LL BE A *BETTER* LIFE.

ME AND *CRYSTAL*-- I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO BE A *TEAM*. IT'S TAKING SOME GETTING *USED* TO--

--KNOWING THAT SOME *OTHER* GUY'S WITH HER NOW--

YEAR

--AND THAT, PRETTY *SOON*, JOHNNY STORM'S JUST GONNA BE A GUY SHE *KNEW*--

--*ONCE*-- A LONG *TIME* AGO.

YA KNOW, KID-- IT'S *FUNNY*. A FREAK LIKE ME-- AN' I'M THE ONLY BUM HERE WITH THE GIRL HE *LOVES*.

GETS YA *THINKIN'*, DON'T IT?

NO, BEN... IT ONLY MAKES ME REALIZE HOW *FORTUNATE* I AM...

...TO HAVE THE MOST *WONDERFUL* MAN OF ALL.

YEAH... WITH A MUG THAT BUSTS *MIRRORS*.

BEN, YOU'LL NEVER *UNDER-STAND*-- AND THAT'S WHY I *LOVE* YOU.

HEY, LOOK! IT'S ALMOST TWELVE O'CLOCK.

PRETTY SOON THAT GOLD BALL'S GONNA DROP--

--AN' IT'S 1973!

1973! THINK ABOUT IT, JOHNNY-- THREE QUARTERS OF A CENTURY!

LORD, HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED SINCE 1900...

PERHAPS THE WORLD ISN'T PERFECT YET, SON-- I DON'T KNOW IF WE'D LIKE IT IF IT WERE--

BUT IT'S BETTER NOW THAN BEFORE-- AND IF WE ALL KEEP TRYING--!

I STILL CAN'T BE SURE I AGREE WITH YOU, REED...

BUT, IF YOU CAN SMILE, WITH YOUR KINDA TROUBLES, SO CAN I... I GUESS...

YET-- EVEN AS JOHNNY STORM'S FLAGGING SPIRITS LIFT--

--THE SURROUNDING CROWD GROWS HUSHED--

--AND STARES-- IN STUNNED ASTONISHMENT!

THAT GIRL!

GOOD LORD-- SHE'S HOLDING BACK THE HANDS OF THE CLOCK--!

WHO IS SHE? HOW IN THE NAME OF HEAVEN DID SHE GET UP THERE?

HOLY COW!

IT'S THUNDRA!

THUNDRA! MYSTERIOUS NEW MEMBER OF THE GROUP CALLED THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR--

THUNDRA! WHOSE MISSION BECOMES APPARENT, AS--

BENJAMIN GRIMM! WHEREVER YOU ARE-- I CHALLENGE YOU!

I CHALLENGE YOU-- TO A DUEL YOU CAN NEVER WIN!

LOOK-- THE NEON SIGN AROUND THE ALLIED CHEMICAL BUILDING--

IT'S PRINTING OUT SOME SORT OF MESSAGE!

SHE WANTS TO BATTLE YOU, BEN-- IN SHEA STADIUM-- AT DAWN-- THREE DAYS FROM NOW!

SHEESH! SHE HADDA GO TELL EVERYBODY?

SHE MUST NOT KNOW WE'RE IN THE CROWD, BEN--!

OBVIOUSLY, SHE HOPED TO ATTRACT OUR ATTENTION--

--AND SHE'S DONE THAT-- REMARKABLY WELL!

FIGURES YA'D SEE IT THAT WAY, BIG-WORDS.

THE WAY IT LOOKS TA ME-- SHE'S TRYIN' TA PUT ME ON THE SPOT.

AN' THOUGH OL' BLUE-EYED BENJY AIN'T NEVER HIT A WOMAN--

--BUT THIS TIME I MIGHT JUST MAKE ME AN EXCEPTION!

BEN GRIMM-- NO!

NOW IS NEITHER THE TIME-- NOR THE PLACE!

THAT'S RIGHT, BEN. YOU CAN'T--

FORGET IT, BOSS-MAN!

THIS IS MY FIGHT-- AN' I'LL FIGHT IT MY WAY!

YOU'D BETTER STAY BACK HERE, ALICIA.

I'VE GOT A FEELING THINGS ARE GOING TO GET KIND OF TENSE IN A MOMENT OR TWO!

AND IF THEY DO--

--JOHNNY STORM'S GOING TO BE WHERE THE ACTION IS--

--AND SO'S THE HUMAN TORCH!

JOHNNY, WAIT!
THIS ISN'T THE WAY!
TELL ME WHAT IS, LEADER-MAN!
I'VE BEEN CLIMBING THE WALLS FOR A WEEK, NOW--
--AND IT'S ABOUT TIME I LET LOOSE-- THE ONLY WAY I KNOW HOW!
YOU! THE FLAMING ONE--
IF YOU ARE HERE--THEN SO MUST BE-- THE THING!
DON'T LET IT WORRY YOU, LADY.
BEN'S A BIT TIED UP-- BUT IF YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM -- I'M ALL EARS!
I'VE NO TIME TO WASTE WITH STRIPLINGS!
SEND ME THE THING AT ONCE-- BEFORE I BREAK THE CODE WHICH STOPS ME FROM SMASHING YOUR FOOLISH MALE EGO--!
NO GO, THUNDRA.
IN CASE YOU HADN'T NOTICED--
THEY DON'T CALL ME THE TORCH FOR LAUGHS!
REED ONCE TOLD ME I COULD RAISE MY BODY HEAT TO ONE THOUSAND DEGREES!
LET'S JUST TRY A FRACTION OF THAT--
--AND SEE IF IT MAKES YOU A LITTLE MORE FRIENDLY!
THE HEAT-- INCREDIBLE--

AN IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY--

--YET ULTIMATELY-- A FUTILE ONE!

RRIPP

YOU MALES UNDERESTIMATE THE STRENGTH OF THUNDRA--

--A STRENGTH WHICH MORE THAN EQUALS THE THING'S OWN!

SWOOSH!

YOU'RE MISSING ME BY A MILE, SISTER--

--OR ARE YOU?

NOW I UNDERSTAND! YOU DIDN'T WANT TO HIT ME--!

SWISH!

YOU'RE SPINNING THAT CLOCK ARROW LIKE A BLADE PROPELLOR--

--BLOWING OUT MY FLAME!

AND WITHOUT MY FLAME-- I CAN'T FLY!

I'LL FALL!

EVERYTHING'S MOVING TOO QUICKLY--

BEN, YOU'VE GOT TO STOP HER!

NOW HE TELLS ME!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, BIG BRAINS?

YOU GOTTA HAVE A HOUSE FALL ON YA OR SUMTHIN'?

YOU ARRIVE TOO LATE, BENJAMIN GRIMM.

MUCH AS IT PAINS ME TO HARM A MEMBER OF THE WEAKER SEX--

--THE TORCH MUST BE ELIMINATED-- AT ONCE!

JOHNNY! NO!

YEARS OF TRAINING-- INSTINCTIVE REFLEX:

IN ONE STARTLING SPLIT SECOND, THE TWO JOIN TOGETHER--

REED RICHARD'S ELASTIC ARMS REACH OUT-- MEDUSA'S NEAR-SENTIENT SCARLET COILS WRITHE AND TWINE--

--AND THE FALLING JOHNNY STORM IS SAVED--

TIMES SQ.

--BY A HAIR!*

*SORRY, GANG. --SHEEPISHGER.

BUT MEANWHILE...

MY APOLOGIES, BENJAMIN GRIMM. I'D ALMOST PREFER TO CRUSH YOU NOW--

--BUT MY PLANS DEMAND I POST-PONE THAT DUTY--FOR THREE DAYS!

YEAH? AN' WHAT IF I DON'T GO ALONG?

WHAT IF I SAY NO?

I HARDLY THINK YOU'LL REFUSE, MAN-MONSTER!

NOT WITH THE LIFE OF YOUR FEMALE AT STAKE!

BEN--WHAT'S HAPPENING--?

QUIET, WOMAN!

DO YOU WANT THOSE MEN TO THINK YOU'RE WEAK?

BEN!

SHE GOT ALICIA-- CARRYIN' HER OFF ON THAT FLYIN' DISK!

ALICIA-- BABY--!

DO NOT DISAPPOINT ME, BENJAMIN GRIMM! THREE DAYS FROM TODAY-- AT DAWN! BATTLE ME-- OR THE WOMAN DIES!

A STUNNED HUSH SETTLES OVER THE ONLOOKING CROWD-- A SILENCE SUDDENLY BROKEN BY--

ALICIA, HONEY! I WON'T LET YA DOWN!

I'LL SAVE YA, KID--I PROMISE YA THAT--

WE'LL BACK YOU UP--ALL THE WAY, OLD FRIEND.

BUT RIGHT NOW--WE'D BETTER GET BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING--AND SEE IF WE CAN TRACE THUNDRA!

DON'T WORRY, BEN--

TWAING!

AND THAT MEANS TRAVELING--

AS FAST AS WE CAN!

AMSTEL

FIZZ CO

HEY, D.W.--TAKE A GLANCE OUT THE WINDOW!

AIN'T THAT A SIGHT?

THE FANTASTIC FOUR--FLYIN' RIGHT ON * BY LUKE CAGE--

--AN' NOT EVEN STOPPIN' FOR A DUDE'S AUTOGRAPH!

* WHO HERE DOESN'T KNOW MARVEL'S OWN HERO FOR HIRE?--R.T.

IT'S AN EVEN TEN BLOCKS FROM TIMES SQUARE TO THE MIDTOWN OFFICE BUILDING THE FF USES AS A HEADQUARTERS--

--TEN BLOCKS COVERED IN LESS THAN TEN SECONDS!

Drink MILK

Joe STEAK

EAT

ICATESSEN

YET, NOT ONE OF THE FOUR FEELS JOY--FOR THEY KNOW THAT SUCH TIME-SAVING IS MERELY AN ILLUSION--

--ONE THAT ONLY CONCEALS THE DEADLY DANGER YET TO COME!

...LATE LAST NIGHT, AND SINCE THAT TIME **SPECULATION** ABOUT THURSDAY'S DAWN BATTLE HAS GROWN INCREASINGLY **DRAMATIC.**

ALREADY, THE CITY'S **OFF-TRACK BETTING** CORPORATION HAS ISSUED **ODDS** ON THE FIGHT--

VS THUN 7-5

--AND MANY OF THE NATION'S LEADING **NEWSPAPERS** HAVE JOINED IN A JOURNALISTIC **RACE** TO GARNER THE WIDEST **OPINION** ON THE SUBJECT!

DAILY LEDGE
BATTLE SET FOR
STAD IN
15¢ MORNING 12¢ LEDGE
FIGHT OF THE CENTURY

"EVEN SO, MANY OF THE MORE **PUBLIC** SUPER-HEROES--SUCH AS THE WORLD-FAMOUS **AVENGERS**--HAVE REFUSED TO COMMENT ON THE UPCOMING CONFLICT--

"--THOUGH THEY MUST CERTAINLY BE **AWARE** OF IT!"

WELL? WHAT DO YOU **THINK,** THOR?

'TIS **MADNESS**-- NO MORE.

DAILY SUN
THUNDRA VS THING

VERILY, THE WAYS OF MORTALS DO **CONTINUE** TO ASTOUND ME!

...THE THING VERSUS THAT **THUNDRA** CHICK, HM?

MUCH AS I LIKE OLD BENJY*, I HATE TO **ADMIT** IT--BUT MY MONEY'S ON THE **LADY!**

*BEN AND SPIDEY MET IN TEAM-UP #7. --RT.

HULK DOESN'T **UNDERSTAND.** PICTURES SAY **FIGHT.**

WHY GIRL WANT TO HIT ROCK-THING? MAKE HULK'S **HEAD** HURT.

FIGHT **DUMB.**

THUNDRA VS TH
DAILY MIRROR

EVERYONE DUMB.

AYE, OPINION RUNS **STRONG** ACROSS THE COUNTRY--

--BUT CERTAINLY NO STRONGER THAN IT DOES IN AN ABANDONED **WATER TOWER** IN QUEENS--

--WHERE--

LOSIN' YER **NERVE,** GIRLIE?

HARDLY. I'M MERELY **AMUSED** BY THIS WOMAN'S FAITH IN HER **MALE.**

SHE BELIEVES HE'LL **BEAT** ME.

1000

600

SHE **DOES,** HUH?

SHE BETTER NOT GO GETTIN HER *HOPES* UP, WE PROMISED TA SET YA UP WITH THE WORLD'S *STRONGEST* MAN--

--AN' AFTER YA HANDLE *HIM*-- WHY-- THERE AIN'T MUCH NEED FOR *HER* TA HANG AROUND, *IS* THERE?

SIMPERING MALE!

HOW DARE YOU EVEN *INSINUATE* I'D ALLOW SUCH A THING?

WHAK!

HOLD, THUNDRA-- THE WINGLESS WIZARD *COMMANDS* IT!

AS FOR *YOU,* SANDMAN--

IN THE *FUTURE*-- TRY TO MAINTAIN A CERTAIN *DIGNITY.*

YOUR CRUDENESS IS UNBEFITTING OF *THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR!*

THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR-- A COLLECTION OF NEAR-POWERLESS *MEN.*

WITHOUT *THUNDRA,* YOUR STRENGTH WOULD BE LESS THAN A *QUARTER* OF WHAT IT IS!

THAT MAY *BE*--

50¢

-- BUT I *ASSURE* YOU-- YOU'LL FIND THE *THING* SOME-WHAT MORE *PHYSICAL* THAN WE-- UNLESS YOU *PRE-PARE* YOURSELF, AS PLANNED!

HAVE *PATIENCE,* MY FRIENDS. AT THE MOMENT-- WE *REQUIRE* HER AID. *SOON,* HOWEVER-- CONDITIONS WILL *CHANGE.*

YES, INDEED.

HEY, BENJY-- TAKE IT *EASY.*

YOU'VE ALREADY CRUNCHED *SIX* OF THOSE BABIES.

50¢

YA AIN'T SEEN *NUTHIN',* TORCHIE.

I'VE GOT ME A **STAKE** IN THIS FIGHT--

-- HER NAME'S **ALICIA**--

-- AND MISTER, THAT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THE **WORLD!**

RUNCH!

TWO DAYS: AND THEN, ONLY **ONE.**

THOSE LAST HOURS PASS **QUICKLY,** READYING THE STADIUM IN QUEENS FOR ITS **GREATEST** CONFLICT--

--AS, UNDER THE STADIUM'S POWERFUL **ARC LIGHTS,** TWO SUPERHUMAN FORMS MOVE TO **AID** IN THE PREPARATIONS--

--IN WAYS ONLY **THEY** CAN!

THEN, THE MOMENT **ARRIVES.** DAWN IS BUT AN **HOUR** AWAY-- THE MORNING AIR IS **CRISP** WITH WINTER--

--AND **LOUD** WITH THE VOICES OF THE THRONGS GATHERED TO **VIEW** THE COMING **BATTLE.**

TO VIEW-- AND TO **WAGER,** AS WELL!

WE LOVE THUNDRA

WELL, GRIMM... THIS IS **IT.**

YA CAN'T PUT IT OFF ANY **LONGER.**

...'CAUSE THIS IS THE ONE THAT **COUNTS.**

HOME
VISITORS
1 2 3 4 5 6
...THOUGH SOMEHOW I KINDA WISH IT WUZ A BIT MORE PRIVATE.

PRIVACY WOULD NOT SUIT MY *PURPOSE*, BENJAMIN GRIMM.

THE DEFEAT OF EARTH'S STRONGEST MALE IS SOMETHING I WISH THE *WORLD* TO WITNESS--

-- FOR REASONS-- *ALL MY OWN!*

I'LL BET YER GREAT AT *RALLIES*, MUSCLE-LADY.

THUNDRA...THING... I'VE BEEN APPOINTED BY THE MAYOR TO *REFEREE* THIS... AH... *BATTLE*.

NOW, I WANT YOU TWO TO *SHAKE HANDS*, AND--

LITTLE MAN-- I CAME HERE TO BEAT *THE THING*--

--NOT TO PLAY GAMES-- WITH *YOU!*

SHEESH! IF YA DIDN'T WANNA GO ACCORDIN' TO THE *RULES*-- WHY DIDN'T YA JUST *SAY* SO?

I'LL TRY 'N MAKE THIS PRETTY *EASY* ON YA-- I AIN'T NEVER *FOUGHT* A GAL BEFORE, REALLY--

YOU BUMBLING MALE--

YOU STILL DON'T *REALIZE*-- THUNDRA IS STRONGER THAN *YOU*--

-- SHE IS STRONGER THAN *ANY MAN ALIVE!*

:OOOCH!:

AND I INTEND TO *EXPOSE* YOUR PITIABLE MALE INFERIORITY--

--*NOW!*

UH-*HUH.*

SOME DAYS IT JUST DON'T *PAY* TA GET OUTTA BED.

FOR AN INSTANT THE CROWD SITS STUNNED--

THUNDRA

--AND IN THAT INSTANT, THUNDRA STEPS ABOARD THE DISK GIVEN HER BY THE WIZARD--

-- AND SAILS TO MEET HER PREY!

TEN BUCKS A SEAT!

ADMIT 1

WHAT A *ROOK!*

LOOKS LIKE THUNDRA'S GOT HER AUDIENCE *ANGRY,* REED!

LET'S JUST HOPE THAT'S *ALL* SHE'S DONE, JOHNNY!

MEDUSA--WE'VE GOT TO *FIND* THEM! BEN MAY NEED OUR *HELP!*

SOME *PLAN* YOU HAD, WIZ, SO WE WERE GONNA BLOW UP THE STADIUM AND GET *BOTH* OF 'EM, HUH?

BEN? IS HE *ALL RIGHT?*

SHUT UP, YOU FOOL. TAKE THE GIRL BACK TO *HEADQUARTERS.*

SANDMAN AND I WILL LOOK FOR OUR WAYWARD *FRIEND.*

FOR *NOW,* SISTER... FOR NOW.

GOTTA DO THIS JUST *RIGHT*--

--OTHERWISE THERE'S GONNA BE SPLATTERED *BENJAMIN GRIMM* ALL OVER THE FLUSHING *SUBWAY!*

:EEEEYOW!:

IF I WUZ A *KID*-- I'D THINK THIS WUZ *GREAT*--

--BUT RIGHT NOW THOUGH-- IT'S GIVIN' ME ONE *HECK* OF A BLASTED *HEADACHE!*

WHUPS. EXCUSE ME, PAL--BUT I'D *FORGOTTEN* ABOUT YA.

JUST *LIKE* THIS TOWN TA KEEP A *BUFFALO HERD* IN FLUSHIN' MEADOW *PARK!*

GUESS IT'S SOME-BODY'S LAMEBRAIN IDEA OF *CONSERVATION.*

HUH? *THUNDRA* --ON TOP OF THE *WORLD-GLOBE!**

WELL--YOU JUST *STAY* THERE, SISTER.

OLD BENJY WON'T KEEP YA WAITIN' *LONG!*

*A RENOWNED RELIC OF THE 1964-65 NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR! --RT

BE SWIFT, "THING"--

YOU HAVE THE WORD OF THUNDRA THAT YOUR END WILL BE QUICK--

GETTIN' A BIT AHEAD OF YERSELF, AREN'T YA, LADY?

I HAVEN'T DROPPED YET!

YOU WILL, BENJAMIN GRIMM.

THOUGH I PROMISE YOU-- I SHALL NOT TAKE UNDO ADVANTAGE OF YOUR SEX--!

THAT CUTS IT, SISTER!

I'VE HAD JUST ABOUT ENOUGH OF THIS "WEAKER SEX" BUNK!

ON THE CONTRARY, GRIMM--

YOU HAVEN'T EVEN BEEN TOUCHED!

KOK!

NOW DO YOU CONCEDE?

SISTER, I DON'T ADMIT NUTHIN'!

FAR AS I'M CONCERNED-- WE AIN'T EVEN BEGUN TA FIGHT!

DO YOU ADMIT THAT I'M MORE POWERFUL THAN YOU?

THAT IS WHERE YOU ARE MOST WRONG, BENJAMIN GRIMM.

FOR YOU-- THE BATTLE IS MOST DEFINITELY OVER!

SNAK!

EVERY NERVE SEEMS TO SNAP INSIDE THE SKULL OF THE MAN CALLED BENJAMIN GRIMM.

HE FINDS HIMSELF FALLING--

--AND ONLY HIS REFLEXES SAVE HIM--

--THOUGH IT SEEMS THAT SAVING IS ONLY A DELAY--

--FOR THE PAINFULLY INEVITABLE! AND THEN--

DO YOU CONCEDE?

NOT... ON... YER... LIFE.

THERE, MEDUSA-- WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME.

IF SHE HITS HIM AGAIN--

BEN'S FINISHED!

THEN FIRE THAT MACHINE OF YOURS, REED RICHARDS.

WHY ELSE HAVE WE BROUGHT IT HERE?

ONE INSTANT: DIVIDED INTO ITS COMPONENT PARTS--

THE END

--SPLIT BY A PIERCING, TRANSFORMING RAY DESIGNED BY THE BRILLIANT BRAIN OF A MAN CALLED RICHARDS--

--A RAY WHICH HAS A SOMEWHAT UNEXPECTED EFFECT ON THE FORM OF THE CREATURE WE KNOW AS--THE THING!

NO! HE'S--HE'S BECOME HUMAN AGAIN!

I'VE BEEN CHEATED-- CHEATED!

I DON'T KNOW HOW-- BUT YOU'VE WON THIS ROUND, BEN GRIMM.

I CANNOT INJURE A WEAKLING MAN! IT WOULD BE COMPLETELY-- UNFEMININE.

JUS' TRY SUMTHIN', SISTER--

I'M-- NOT AFRAID OF YOU-- NOT AFRAID OF ANYTHING.

I'M THE THING, Y' UNDERSTAND?

I'M--THE THING--!

THE EFFECTS ARE WEARING OFF, REED.

HE'S COLLAPSING!

A PITY THE RAY PRODUCES ONLY A *TEMPORARY* CHANGE BACK TO BEN GRIMM--

UP TO NOW, I'D CONSIDERED IT A *FAILURE*--

BUT IT SUCCEEDED WELL *ENOUGH*-- TO SAVE THE THING'S *LIFE!*

SEVERAL MINUTES PASS AS REED RICHARDS ADMINISTERS TO THE UNCONSCIOUS THING -- UNTIL *FINALLY*--

ALICIA HONEY... IS IT *YOU?*

OR AM I DEAD AND *DREAMIN'?*

THUNDRA FORCED THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR TO *RELEASE* ME, BEN.

THEN SHE BROUGHT ME *HERE.*

SHE *DID,* HUH?

GUESS YA CAN NEVER FIGGER A *DAME.*

THOUGH THAT'S *ONE* LADY I OWE A WORLD'A *THANKS.*

I WONDER, BEN-- WHY DID THUNDRA WANT SO DESPERATELY TO *BEAT* YOU?

YA GOT *ME,* STRETCH.

SOMETHIN' TELLS ME WE'LL BE FINDIN' *OUT,* THOUGH--

--YEAH-- SOME DAY REAL *SOON!*

FINI

AND NOW, AN UNABASHED EPILOGUE:

DON'T BOTHER TO *EXPLAIN,* YOU MISERABLE INCOMPETENT.

IT'S OBVIOUS THAT WOMAN *OVERPOWERED* YOU-- ACTING ALONG HER OWN INCOMPREHENSIBLE LOGIC OF *FAIR PLAY.*

I'M *SORRY,* BOSS-- I *TRIED* TO STOP HER--

--BUT SHE WAS JUST *TOO MUCH--!*

SAVE YOUR *EXCUSES,* TRAPSTER. YOU'LL HAVE YOUR CHANCE FOR *REVENGE*-- LATER!

NO ONE MAKES FOOLS OF THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR--

SO SWEARS THE WINGLESS WIZARD!!

TH-TH-THAT'S ALL, FOLKS--FOR NOW--!

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP™
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
20¢ CC
134 MAY 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

STOP HIM! HE'S GOT MY WIFE-- MY CHILD!

BUT-- IF WE MAKE HIM LET GO OF THEM--

--THEY'LL FALL TO THEIR DEATHS!!

THE DRAGON MAN STALKS THE SKIES!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

A DRAGON STALKS THE SKIES!

IT'S GONE, REED!

THE HOUSE-- THE GROUNDS-- EVERY-THING! GONE!

MAYBE YA BETTER CHECK THE MAP, STRETCHO.

WITH YOU DRIVIN'-- WE COULD BE IN EAST HOBOKEN.

THERE'S NO MISTAKE, BEN... UNLESS WE'VE ALL GONE MAD.

INSANE AS IT SEEMS, WHISPER HILL AND AGATHA HARKNESS-- HAS COMPLETELY VANISHED OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH!

A MYSTERIOUS SUMMONS--A HURRIED JOURNEY UPSTATE: OUT OF SUCH BEGINNINGS ARE NIGHTMARES BORN. AND BELIEVE US, PILGRIM--FOR OUR UNSUSPECTING HEROES--THE NIGHTMARE HASN'T YET BEGUN!

14032

GERRY CONWAY, SCRIPTER * JOHN BUSCEMA and JOE SINNOTT, ARTISTS * ARTIE SIMEK, LETTERER * DAVID HUNT, COLORIST * ROY THOMAS, EDITOR

IT'S JUST A *CRATER,* REED--

YOU CAN'T EVEN TELL THERE WAS ONCE A *HOUSE* THERE.

MAYBE THERE *WUZN'T,* HOTSHOT.

MAYBE WE ALL *DREAMED* IT WHEN WE WUZ SLEEPIN'.

I CAN'T *UNDERSTAND* IT. MISS HARKNESS CALLED US LESS THAN *THIRTY MINUTES* AGO.

SHE SAID IT CONCERNED MY *SON*--THAT WE SHOULD COME TO HER AT *ONCE.*

ARE YOU CERTAIN IT WAS *SHE,* REED?

POSITIVE, MEDUSA.

WE--SUE AND I--HAVE KNOWN HER FOR *YEARS.* THIS DOESN'T MAKE *SENSE.*

FACE THE *FACTS,* LEADER-MAN.

EITHER WE'VE BEEN *DUPED*--

--OR OLD AGATHA'S IN *BIG TROUBLE.*

THE SIDES OF THAT CRATER ARE LIKE *GLASS*--

--*FUSED* BY SOMETHING PRETTY *HOT.* WHATEVER IT WAS PROBABLY HIT THE *HOUSE!*

WHETHER IT GOT MISS HARKNESS IS SOMETHING *ELSE* AGAIN.

THEN THERE'S *NOTHING* WE CAN DO. WE MIGHT AS WELL RETURN TO *MANHATTAN.*

SHEESH! CAN YA BEAT *THAT?*

STRETCH *NEVER* QUIT BEFORE--IT AIN'T *NATURAL.*

HE'S TAKING HIS SEPARATION FROM SUE VERY *BADLY,* BEN.

YEAH--BUT FOR A WHILE I THOUGHT HE'D SNAP *OUTTA* IT.

IT'S NOT *EASY* LOSING A LOVED ONE--A WIFE, A *CHILD.*

I THINK HE HOPED MISS HARKNESS WOULD HAVE *WORD* OF SUE AND LITTLE FRANKLIN--BUT NOW--

--HE HAS ONLY HIS *DESPAIR.*

HEY, WE'RE *LEAVING?*

WHAT'S THE *RUSH?*

YER BROTHER-IN-LAW'S GOT SOME BLAMED *EXPERIMENT* COOKIN' BACK THE LAB, MATCH-HEAD.

WHAT *ELSE?*

*WHAT ELSE, **INDEED?** THERE'S MORE TO THIS SCENE THAN MEETS THE NAKED OPTIC--AND THOUGH **NONE** ABOARD THE RAPIDLY-VANISHING FANTASTI-CAR IS AWARE OF THIS UNSEEN **WATCHER**--*

*--WE CAN FOLLOW ITS PROGRESS WITH **EASE,** AS IT LIFTS FROM ITS HIDING PLACE AND SKIMS AFTER ITS UNSUSPECTING **QUARRY.***

*NOW, TO LEARN THE **REASON** FOR THIS MULTI-LENSED FLYING EYE--*

*--LET'S BRIEFLY TURN TO A DISTANT MANHATTAN **OFFICE,** WHERE ONE WALL IS ALMOST COMPLETELY COVERED WITH NEATLY-FOCUSED **MONITORS,** EACH SHOWING A DIFFERENT VIEW OF THE SAME FAR-OFF SCENE--**WHISPER HILL.***

EXCELLENT. ALL PROCEEDS *PRECISELY* ACCORDING TO PLAN.

IT WAS A STROKE OF **GOOD FORTUNE** THAT THE FANTASTIC FOUR SHOULD **CHOOSE THIS** DAY TO JOURNEY AWAY FROM THEIR URBAN ENVIRONS--

--A **DOUBLE** BIT OF LUCK THAT THE OBJECT OF THEIR VISIT SHOULD HAVE **VANISHED** SO CONVENIENTLY--ALLOWING ME A FREE HAND TO GO AHEAD AT MY OWN LEISURELY **PACE.**

THE ONLY FLAW IS SUE RICHARD'S **ABSENCE**--A **MINOR** DIFFICULTY, AT WORST.

IT HARDLY **MATTERS.**

SOON, SHE-- **ALL** OF THEM-- WILL BE MY **GUESTS**--

PERMANENTLY.

AND MILES AWAY, THE EYE **SHIFTS** IN ITS FLIGHT--

--ONE OF ITS LENSES BEGINS TO **GLOW,** IN RESPONSE TO A CIRCUIT CLOSED IN A SMOKE-FILLED **ROOM**--

--AND BEFORE TWO **HEARTBEATS** HAVE PASSED, A FIERCE BEAM OF LIGHT **SLICES** THROUGH THE AFTERNOON SKY--REACHES--

SKREEE

--AND STRIKES!

BREEE-

GWOOM!!

REED--WHAT'S *HAPPENED?* WHAT *HIT* US?

I DON'T *KNOW,* JOHNNY!

WHATEVER IT WAS--IT KNOCKED OUT OUR *GUIDANCE CONTROLS!*

WE'RE GOING TO *CRASH!*

AT ONCE, TRAINED *REFLEXES* SNAP INTO ACTION; EACH MEMBER OF THE TEAM MOVES TO SAVE HIMSELF IN HIS OWN *PECULIAR* MANNER--

EACH ONE *EXCEPT*--

BEN!

HE'S TOO FAR AWAY--FALLING TOO *FAST!*

JOHNNY--TRY TO--

BUT, WARNED TOO LATE, THE HUMAN TORCH MOVES TOO *SLOWLY,* AND--

WHOM!

HE'S *DOWN*...AND HE'S NOT *MOVING!*

REED, THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN *DO...*

LET *ME* DECIDE THAT, MEDUSA--

--BENJAMIN GRIMM'S MY *FRIEND!*

YER MAKIN' ME *CRY*, STRING-BEAN.

IF YER SUCH A *PAL*...NEXT TIME, LET *ME* DRIVE, WILLYA?

YER A BLASTED *MANIAC!*

IT WASN'T *REED*--

SOMETHING *SHOT* AT US--TRIED TO *KILL* US.

WE'RE FORTUNATE TO HAVE ESCAPED WITH OUR *LIVES.*

WHADDA WE STICKIN' AROUND *HERE* FOR, THEN?

LET'S HITCH A RIDE BACK TA *NEW YORK*--

--AN' FIND OUT WHAT'S GOIN' *ON!*

NO!

THE MAN WHO *DESIGNED* THAT EYE SHALL *PAY* FOR HIS INCOMPETENCE!

I HAVE NOT PLANNED SO LONG --AND SO *WELL*-- TO SEE IT ALL RUINED BECAUSE OF SOME TECHNICIAN'S IMBECILIC *BLUNDER!*

THE EYE SHOULD HAVE BLASTED THEM *UNCONSCIOUS*--

--AND THEN, WHILE THEY *SLEPT*, MY MEN COULD HAVE *CAPTURED* THEM.

FATHER...?

AND *ALL* WOULD HAVE GONE ACCORDING TO MY FLAWLESS *PLAN!*

CAN I *SPEAK* WITH YOU?

THOMAS!

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU NOT TO **DISTURB** ME, BOY?

GREGORY GIDEON WILL NOT BE **DISOBEYED!***

*OKAY, TRUE-BELIEVERS: HOW MANY OF YOU **GUESSED** IT WAS THE MAN CALLED GIDEON--FROM **FF #34.**?--RT.

BUT, FATHER--I ONLY WANTED TO ***TALK*** TO YOU. IT'S BEEN SO ***LONG*** SINCE WE TALKED... SINCE ***MOTHER*** DIED.

I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO BE...***FRIENDS*** AGAIN. THAT'S WHAT YOU ***PROMISED...***

I JUST ***THOUGHT...*** WE WERE GOING TO BE FRIENDS...

THOMAS, MY ***SON...***

THOMAS, YOU JUST DON'T ***UNDER-STAND.***

I'VE BEEN ***ILL*** THESE PAST FEW MONTHS... ***VERY*** ILL.

I ***KNOW*** I HAVEN'T BEEN--MYSELF--BUT THIS WILL ***PASS,*** I PROMISE YOU.

YOU MUST ***FORGIVE*** ME IF I'M RUDE TO YOU--

--BUT I'VE A GREAT DEAL ON MY ***MIND.***

YES, FATHER...I UNDER-STAND. I'M SORRY IF I ***BOTHERED*** YOU.

YOU ***NEVER*** BOTHER ME, SON--IT'S JUST THAT, SOMETIMES, I NEED TO BE ***ALONE.***

OF ***COURSE,*** FATHER... I CAN UNDER-STAND THAT...

...I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU ***MEAN.***

BECAUSE OF INCOMPETENCE, "PLAN A" FAILED. IT IS TIME, THEN, TO INITIATE "PLAN B"!

BEFORE THIS DAY IS OUT, SUE RICHARDS WILL BE MY CAPTIVE--

--BOTH HER-- AND HER PRECIOUS LITTLE CHILD!

AND WHAT OF REED RICHARD'S ESTRANGED WIFE? WHERE DOES A WOMAN GO WHEN SHE LEAVES HUSBAND AND HOME-- AND STARTS HER LIFE ALL OVER?

PERHAPS SHE GOES BACK TO HER BEGINNINGS...

...AND IN THE CASE OF SUSAN STORM, THOSE BEGINNINGS ARE IN RURAL PENNSYLVANIA, ON THE FARM OF A CHILDHOOD FRIEND.

"ZELDA" LIKES YOU, SUE. YOU RIDE WELL.

IT'S BEEN YEARS, CAROL... ALMOST TEN YEARS.

I FEEL LIKE A GIRL AGAIN!

AND YOU LOOK LIKE ONE, PRETTY LADY.

GUESS MOTHER-HOOD DOES THINGS FOR A WOMAN'S LOOKS.

HAS FRANKLIN BEEN GIVING YOU MUCH TROUBLE, BOB?

NOT A BIT.

THAT'S QUITE A KID YOU'VE GOT THERE.

HE JUST SITS, WATCHING THOSE ANTS...

...AND THEY KEEP MARCHING IN CIRCLES, LIKE THEY WERE FOLLOWING ORDERS.

SOMETHING IN WHAT BOB SAYS, DESPITE HIS LIGHT TONE, **DISTURBS** SUE RICHARDS--TOUCHING A HIDDEN FEAR, A SUB-CONSCIOUS **APPREHENSION**--

BOB,..DO YOU **THINK**...

DO YOU THINK THERE'S ANYTHING **STRANGE**...?

ABOUT **FRANKLIN**? NAW. KIDS JUST LOVE **NATURE**, SUE.

HECK, I REMEMBER ONE AFTERNOON WHEN I--

WE **HEARD** THAT ONE, BOB.

YEAH, HONEY-- I GUESS YOU **DID**.

I SUPPOSE IT **IS** JUST MY IMAGINATION.

I DON'T WANT ANYTHING TO **HAPPEN** TO HIM, THAT'S ALL.

SURE, KID. BUT YOU'VE GOT TO REALIZE--THIS FARM'S PROBABLY THE **QUIETEST** PLACE ON THE EA--

HOLEEEEEE COW!

WHAT IN THE NAME OF HEAVEN--??

HEAVEN HAS NOTHING TO **DO** WITH IT, BOB LANDERS. IT'S **PURELY** THE DOING OF--

DRAGON MAN!!

DRAGON-MAN! AN ANDROID CREATION GIVEN LIFE BY THE HAND OF THE MYSTERIOUS DIABLO--A RAMPAGING TON OF MUSCLE AND RAGE--A SEMI-INTELLIGENT MONSTER WITH A STREAK OF ALMOST-HUMAN LOVE--LOVE FOR ONE PERSON--

--SUE RICHARDS!!

(AND FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO CARE ABOUT SUCH THINGS--D-MAN WAS LAST SEEN IN SUB-MARINER #16.--ROY.)

SUE! GET BACK FROM THERE, GIRL!

WHATEVER THAT THING IS--IT'S COMIN' YOUR WAY!

NO! HE'S AFTER FRANKLIN--

SOMEHOW, I KNOW THAT'S WHO HE WANTS!

RUN, BOTH OF YOU!

MY FORCE-FIELD CAN PROTECT FRANKLIN AND I--

--BUT NOTHING CAN STOP DRAGON-MAN FROM REACHING YOU!

YET IT SEEMS SUE RICHARD'S BOAST IS SPOKEN TOO QUICKLY--FOR, JUST AN INSTANT LATER--

THAT MONSTER'S GRABBED HER--FORCE-FIELD AND ALL!

CAROL, CALL REED--I'VE GOT TO TRY AND STOP THIS THING--

--HOLD IT DOWN LONG AS I CAN, BEFORE--

WHUNK!

BOB LANDERS DOESN'T FINISH HIS EXHORTATION.

WITH AN ANGRY SNARL, THE DRAGON-MAN GIVES AN OFFHAND SHRUG--

--AND PROCEEDS ON HIS WAY--

--AS OBLIVIOUS OF THE TWO BELOW AS WE WOULD BE--OF FLIES.

MEANWHILE, IN URBAN NEW YORK, IN THE BOROUGH CALLED MANHATTAN, AND THE AREA KNOWN AS MIDTOWN...

REED'S DOWN, ALL RIGHT...

GUESS I CAN UNDERSTAND WHY.

BUT, AS THE PRIVATE ELEVATOR SLIDES TO A HALT--

--AND THE TEAMMATES STEP OUT INTO THE GLOOM OF THE PARTIALLY-LIT BAXTER BUILDING HEADQUARTERS, JOHNNY'S THOUGHTS ARE ABRUPTLY BROKEN BY--

THE PHONE! IT'S SUE--

BRRING

IT'S GOT TO BE SUE!

BRRING

DARLING, I--OH... HELLO, CAROL.

...COULD YOU OTHERS EXCUSE ME? I'D LIKE TO TAKE THIS CALL PRIVATELY.

WITH QUIET UNDERSTANDING, REED RICHARD'S FRIENDS COMPLY...AND SO...

YA KNOW, THESE PAST FEW DAYS-- THINGS'A BEEN PRETTY EASY-GOIN'--

WE AIN'T HAD A REAL TANGLE SINCE THAT THUNDRA DAME AN' ME WALTZED AROUND ON NEW YEARS.

NOW SUMTHIN' COMES UP--AND BIG WORDS WANTS TA CHUCK IT ALL AND PLAY WITH HIS BLAMED TEST TUBES.

WHO'RE YOU FOOLING, BEN? YOU'VE KNOWN REED LONGER THAN ANY OF US.

YOU'RE AS CONCERNED FOR HIM AS WE ARE.

SURE--BUT THAT DON'T MEAN I CAN'T THINK HE'S ACTIN' CRAZY.

AND IF YOU DON'T THINK HE HAS, THEN--

UM. HIYA, STRETCH.

YEP... SUMTHIN'S ***WRONG,*** ALL RIGHT.

REED ***NEVER*** ACTED LIKE THAT BEFORE... WALKIN' OUT WITHOUT SAYIN' A ***WORD.***

C'MON, KIDDIES. WE'RE GONNA HAVE A ***TALK*** WITH STRETCHO...

...AND FIND OUT WHAT'S GOIN' ON... ***ONCE AN' FER ALL!***

TOO LATE, BEN.

GUESS HE DIDN'T FEEL LIKE ***STICK-ING AROUND.***

THAT'S WHAT I ***LIKE*** ABOUT YA, TORCHIE.

YER A REGULAR ***SHERLOCK HOLMES.***

*IN THE TIME IT TAKES FOR A **PHONE** TO BE ANSWERED, A MESSAGE RELAYED, AND A WORRIED HUSBAND TO TAKE TO THE SMOG-LADEN **SKIES,** SEVERAL **MILES** CAN BE COVERED BY LEATHERY WINGS--AND SO, AS WE PICK UP ONCE MORE ON DRAGON-MAN AND HIS UNWILLING **PASSENGERS,** WE FIND THEM SWOOPING OVER LONG ISLAND CITY IN **QUEENS**--*

*--THEIR DESTINATION **UNKNOWN,** THE PURPOSE OF SUE RICHARD'S ABDUCTION A TOTAL **MYSTERY**--THOUGH DESTINATION AND PURPOSE ARE BOTH SOON TO BE **REVEALED**--!*

WE'RE HEADING *DOWN*--TOWARD THOSE BUILDINGS BELOW.

IT LOOKS LIKE A *RESEARCH PLANT*--

--AND THERE SEEM TO BE *MEN* WAITING--

--*MEN WITH GUNS!*

THAT'S *THEM*--RIGHT ON *SCHEDULE.*

BOSS SAID TO TAKE 'EM *INSIDE...*

...ANY WAY WE *HAD* TO!

*WITH A GROWL DEEP IN THE RECESSES OF HIS MASSIVE **THROAT**, DRAGON-MAN SETTLES TO THE GROUND, RELEASING HIS PRISONERS--AND **EYEING** THE MEN APPROACHING--*

CAREFUL NOW, MEN--THAT'S THE *INVISIBLE GIRL.*

SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE *TROUBLE*--

*MISTER--YOU DON'T KNOW THE **HALF** OF IT!*

NO ONE THREATENS MY CHILD! NO ONE!

SHE'S A *WILDCAT!*

THE BOSS WAS *RIGHT!*

WE *WILL* NEED THESE NETS--AND *HOW!*

*BUT THOSE PARTICULAR NETS WILL NEVER GET **DELIVERED**, AS--*

RAWRRR!

FOOM!

THAT MONSTER THINKS WE'RE GONNA *HARM* THE GIRL!

HE'S TRYING TO *PROTECT* HER!

THE BOSS *WARNED* US THIS MIGHT HAPPEN--

--THAT UGLY'S ALWAYS HAD A *SOFT SPOT* FOR THE RICHARDS CHICK!

SHUT UP AN' KEEP *FIRIN'*! THESE *VIBRO-PISTOLS* OUGHTA MAKE MINCE-MEAT OUTTA HIM--THEY DO THINGS TO HIS *NERVOUS-SYSTEM*--

RAWRR

--CHOKIN' IT OFF, SO'S IT CAN'T GET ANY MESSAGES FROM HIS *MIND*!

WHAT THERE *IS* OF IT-- *HAH*!

IT'S *WORKING*! HE'S GOING *DOWN*!

NOW, FOR THAT-- *HUNH*?!

SHE MUST'A GONE *INVISIBLE* ON US--PROBABLY THINKS SHE CAN MAKE A *RUN* FER IT, THAT WAY!

IN FOR A LITTLE *SHOCK*, ISN'T SHE, BOYS?

SURE *IS*, WALLY!

"WITH THESE SPECIAL *INFRA-RED GOGGLES*--WE CAN PICK UP HER *BODY HEAT*--

--JUST LIKE SEEIN' HER PLAIN AS *DAY*!

A LITTLE WHIFF OF THIS *KNOCK-OUT SPRAY*...

SPIFF!!

...AND THE LADY'S ALL *OURS*!

TAKE 'EM *BELOW*. THE BRAINS WANTA GET STARTED RIGHT *AWAY*.

SEVERAL MILES TO THE NORTH AND **WEST:** A FRANTIC REED RICHARDS GUIDES THE FANTASTI-CAR HIGH OVER THE BARREN CITY STREETS--TOWARD **PENNSYLVANIA!**

MAC TOOL CO.

CONSIDER THIS MAN: HE'S LOST HIS WIFE **ONCE,** TO A HARSH WORD AND A SINCE-REGRETTED **DEMAND--**

NOW, IT SEEMS HE HAS LOST HER **AGAIN,** TO SOMETHING FAR MORE THREATENING THAN **ANGER.**

HE IS A MAN POSSESSED --AND WITH GOOD **REASON.**

HE LOVES HER.

ANY **WORD,** COLONEL?

WE'VE CHECKED THE **AREA,** RICHARDS: THERE'S **NOTHING.**

RADAR **CONFIRMS** IT-- PENNSYLVANIA'S IN THE **CLEAR.**

BUT, **RICHARDS--**

YES, COLONEL?

SAC REPORTS DO INDICATE SOMETHING ODD HAPPENING OVER **LONG ISLAND.**

IT'S **GONE,** NOW, BUT IT SEEMED TO BE SOME SORT OF FLYING **MAN--**

SWISH!

RICHARDS? **RICHARDS?**

BLAST IT, MAN-- **ANSWER ME!**

--CHANCES OF **SHOWERS** EARLY THIS EVENING. ON THE **LIGHTER** SIDE OF THE NEWS, TONIGHT--

--CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES REPORT A **UFO** OVER LONG ISLAND--A MAN DRESSED IN A **DRAGON** COSTUME, SPORTING **WINGS!**

THIS IS DAVE CONSIDINE IN **NEW YORK,** BIDDING YOU A--

CLICK!

THING! DID YOU HEAR THAT--? THE DESCRIPTION COULD FIT ONLY ONE CREATURE--

DRAGON-MAN!

YA EVER GET A LOOK AT MY AUNT PETUNIA?

YA TALK ABOUT MUGS--!

MARVEL COMICS GROUP. WORLDS UNKNOWN 1 20¢

BENJAMIN GRIMM--I AM SERIOUS.

HEY! I PAID TWENTY-CENTS FER THAT MAG--

IT WUZ REAL GOOD, TOO, BLAST IT!

AIN'TCHA GOT NO RESPECT FOR LITERATURE?

THING, THIS IS IM-PORTANT. THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN A LINK BETWEEN THE DRAGON-MAN AND SUE RICHARDS--

THE WAY REED WAS ACTING--DO YOU SUPPOSE--?

LADY, YA GOT A POINT THERE.

WHADDA WE GONNA DO ABOUT IT?

THE TORCH ISN'T HERE, NOW--

WE'LL HAVE TO GO ALONE.

AND PRAY WE'RE ENOUGH!

MEANWHILE, IN THE BOROUGH KNOWN AS THE BRONX...

THIS IS IT.

ACCORDING TO OUR ALUMNI NEWS-PAPER--

--THIS IS WHERE DORRIE EVANS LIVES.

FUNNY, IT'S BEEN ALMOST THREE YEARS SINCE I LAST SAW DORRIE.

WHAT WITH FALLING FOR CRYSTAL, I KINDA LOST TOUCH...

27061

HOPE SHE REMEMBERS HER OLD BEAU, JOHNNY STORM.

YES? WHO IS--

JOHNNY!

DORRIE?

WHO'D YOU THINK IT WAS--*BRIDGET BARDOT?*

LET ME *LOOK* AT YOU, JOHNNY. IT'S BEEN A LONG *TIME*, HASN'T IT?

LONGER THAN I *THOUGHT.*

THE ALUMNI PAPER DIDN'T SAY YOU WERE--*MARRIED?*

IT'S THEIR *BUSINESS?*

THE FACT IS, I'VE BEEN HITCHED FOR --OH--*TWO YEARS.*

I MET MY MAN JUST ABOUT THREE MONTHS AFTER YOU *DROPPED* ME, JOHNNY.

YEAH... WELL... THAT'S REALLY *GREAT,* DORRIE.

I WAS JUST PASSING *BY,* MYSELF--

--HOPE I HAVEN'T-- AH--*DISTURBED* YOU!

WHY DON'T YOU STICK AROUND AND MEET *SAM?*

HE'S MY *HUSBAND.*

URK. NO THANKS, DORRIE--I'LL BE *SEEING* YOU.

WHEW. NOW *THAT'S* A STUNNER.

OLD DORRIE-- DOING THE *HOUSEWIFE* BIT.

GUESS I REALLY *HAVE* BEEN OUT OF TOUCH, AFTER ALL.

I SHOULD HAVE *KNOWN* THAT--

SKREEL

HUH?

BREE-

GHOOM!

JUST WHAT I *NEEDED*-- A LITTLE *ACTION* TO CLEAR THE SOUL!

FLAME ON!

FROM THE *SOUND* OF THAT THING, IT'S THE SAME GADGET THAT BLASTED US *LAST* TIME.!

WHICH IS JUST *FINE!*

BECAUSE NOW I CAN DO WHAT I DIDN'T HAVE A *CHANCE* TO DO BEFORE--

--*TRACE* IT--

--RIGHT BACK TO ITS *SOURCE!*

*MEANWHILE, OTHERS ARE ALSO DOING SOME TRACING--FOLLOWING THE AUTOMATIC **HOMING DEVICE** PRESENT IN THE FANTASTICAR AS ITS HUM LEADS THEM ACROSS **LONG ISLAND**--*

HUMMMMMMMMM

THERE, RED--YA SAID WE'D FIND DRAGON-MAN, AND YA WERE *RIGHT.*

NOW WHADDA WE DO?

UNLESS OUR TRACKER IS *WRONG*--REED MUST BE HERE *ALSO,* THING.

WE'D BETTER *LAND,* AND LOOK AROUND.

THAT TOOK A LOT OF FIGGERIN'?

WAIT, THING--DO YOU *HEAR* IT?

A GENTLE *PULSATION*--LIKE THE DISTANT SOUND OF HEAVY *MACHINERY?*

SORRY, KID. I DON'T HEAR A *THING.*

MAYBE IT'S THE BLASTED *WIND.*

WHIRR

ON THE *OTHER* HAND--

SNAK!

"ZAK!"

CHUMP!

WONDERFUL...YOU HAVE DONE *WELL*, MY FRIENDS.

YOUR REWARD WILL BE *GREAT.*

NOW, *THREE* OF THE ACCURSED FANTASTIC FOUR ARE WITHIN MY GRASP--AS *WELL* AS THE MYSTERIOUS WOMAN NAMED *MEDUSA.*

SOON, THE *FOURTH* OF THEIR NUMBER--THE *HUMAN TORCH*--WILL JOIN US--AND WE MAY *BEGIN!*

AND WHEN THIS DAY IS *DONE,* GREGORY GIDEON WILL FEAR NEITHER MAN NOR *GOD*--FOR HE WILL BE *ABOVE* THEM!

IN HIS BODY WILL BE THE POWERS OF THE STRONGEST BEINGS ON THE *EARTH*--

--AND *GIDEON* WILL BE STRONGEST OF *ALL!*

NEXT: THE *ETERNITY MACHINE!*

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ CC | 135 JUNE 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

™

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

THE ETERNITY MACHINE

HOLY COW! IT'S DRAGON-MAN!

I FOLLOW THIS CRAZY *FLYING EYE* ACROSS HALF OF *LONG ISLAND*, THINKING I'M GOING TO FIND THE JOKERS WHO TRIED TO *BLAST* US*--

--AND INSTEAD OF SOME GADGET-FILLED *ARSENAL*-- I FIND *HIM!*

*LAST ISSUE--ROY.

13617

GERRY CONWAY, WRITER * JOHN BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT, ARTISTS * LETTERED BY: ARTIE SIMEK COLORED BY: P. GOLDBERG * ROY THOMAS, EDITOR

WHOEVER'S *BEHIND* THESE ATTACKS ON THE F.F. HAS TO BE EITHER A GENIUS--OR A *MADMAN.*

NOTHING *ELSE* WOULD MAKE *SENSE.*

'CAUSE IF HE *ISN'T* CRAZY--WHY WOULD HE LET HIS TOY LEAD ME *HERE?*

OF COURSE, IT *COULD* BE A TRAP--

--IN *WHICH* CASE, HE'S MADE A MISTAKE--

--A VERY *BAD* MISTAKE.

THESE DAYS--THE HUMAN TORCH DOESN'T PLAY GAMES --WITH *ANYONE!*

*BUT, AS JOHNNY STORM BRINGS HIS FLAME INTO PLAY, BURNING A PATH THROUGH THE CAMOUFLAGED **TRAPDOOR**--*

*--A SUBTLE **SONIC** SIGNAL STRIKES THE SLUMBERING DRAGON-MAN--*

*--AND THE MONSTROUS CREATURE **WAKES.***

SOME SORT OF *FORCE-FIELD* A FOOT DOWN-- CAN'T *BREAK THROUGH.*

THERE'S *GOT* TO BE ANOTHER WAY *IN.*

I'M NOT GOING TO LET A THING LIKE-- *HUH?*

RRAWWRRRR

DRAGON-MAN!

HE'S *AWAKE!*

AND FROM THE *LOOK* OF HIM--

--HE'S NOT TOO HAPPY TO *SEE* ME!

RAWWRRR

FOOM!

SILENCE FILLS THE TRANQUIL SPRING NIGHT--BUT ONLY FOR A *MOMENT.*

THEN, A LOW *HUM* BREAKS THE QUIET: THE WHISPER OF *MACHINERY--*

--AND THE TREAD OF BOOTED *FEET.*

MEANWHILE, SOME THIRTY FEET BELOW THE RAVAGED LAWN, OTHER MACHINES CONVERSE IN THEIR PRIVATE LANGUAGE-- AND AS THEY DO, THE HUM OF THEIR VOICES IS DROWNED BY ANOTHER VOICE, --ONE ISSUING COMMANDS--

--THE VOICE OF GREGORY GIDEON, MASTER OF THIS PLAN!

PERFECT!

NOW THAT THE TORCH IS MY CAPTIVE, I MAY PROCEED.

PREPARE THE ETERNITY MACHINE, MY FRIEND-- MY LIFE, AND MY SON'S LIFE, NOW DEPEND ON SPEED,

WE'VE GOT THE PUNK, MISTER GIDEON.

YOU WANT WE SHOULD PUT HIM WITH THE OTHERS?

WHERE ELSE, FOOL?

AH, I SEE YOU RECOGNIZE THE INVISIBLE GIRL. SHE'S MRS. RICHARDS NOW, MY FRIEND--

--AND NO LONGER AVAILABLE TO YOUR SIMPLE ANIMAL AFFECTION.

AS FOR HER CONDITION-- SHE IS INDEED MY PRISONER!

EVEN AS YOU ARE.

RAWWRR

MR. GIDEON-- LOOK!!

HE'S FREAKIN' OUT!

IT HAPPENS EVERY TIME HE SEES THE RICHARDS CHICK LOCKED UP--!

HIT 'IM WITH THE VIBRO-PISTOL-- THAT'S WHAT GOT 'IM LAST TIME--

WHUMP

IDIOTS! WHAT WORKED WELL OUTSIDE CANNOT SUCCEED IN SUCH CLOSE QUARTERS.

WE MUST RESORT TO SONIC CONTROL--

--WHICH WOKE OUR RAMBUNCTIOUS FRIEND IN THE FIRST PLACE!

REEEL

DONE!

THE BEAST FALLS!

ONCE AGAIN-- SUPERIOR PLANNING PROVES TRIUMPHANT!

AND THAT, MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, IS WHY GREGORY GIDEON IS IN THE POSITION HE IS TODAY!

BIG DEAL!

SO YA GET YER KICKS HURTIN' DUMB ANDROIDS-- THAT MAKES YA A REAL GENIUS, PAL.

YER KIND'A CREEP COMES IN TWO SIZES--BIG AND SMALL.

YA ASK ME, YER JUST A LITTLE BIGGER THAN MOST--

--BUT YER STILL A CREEP!

BOLD WORDS, THING, FROM ONE SO SECURELY CAGED.

YOUR IMPRECATIONS DO LITTLE MORE THAN AMUSE ME--

--BECAUSE YOU ARE HELPLESS, THING-- HELPLESS!

I'LL SHOW YA WHO'S HELPLESS, TORTOISE-BRAIN!

I'LL-- EEYYAAAHH!

BEN GRIMM... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

THESE LIGHT BEAMS SEEM TO BE CHARGED IN SOME WAY--!

YOUR PARTNER DISCOVERED THAT, MEDUSA--

--ON HIS OWN.

HE--LIKE YOU--IS ONLY BEGINNING TO LEARN THE FULL MAJESTY OF MY STRENGTH.

THOSE "LIGHT-BEAMS", AS YOU CALL THEM, ARE MERELY RADIATED ELECTRONS, MOVING AT A FANTASTIC SPEED.

NO HUMAN MAY HOPE TO PASS THROUGH THEM...

...EVEN YOUR MUCH-VAUNTED TEAM-MATE... THE HUMAN TORCH.

SOON, HE SHALL JOIN THE OTHERS--

--IN THE ETERNITY MACHINE!

THE ETERNITY MACHINE... YOU'VE MENTIONED IT SEVERAL TIMES NOW.

JUST WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING, GREGORY GIDEON...

...AND WHY ARE YOU PLANNING IT AGAINST THE FANTASTIC FOUR?

A PERCEPTIVE QUESTION, MY DEAR. THE *ANSWER* LIES SOME MONTHS IN THE PAST, WHEN I FIRST *MET* YOUR FRIENDS. FOR *FINANCIAL* REASONS, I'D TRIED TO *DESTROY* THEM*...

...AND FORTUNATELY FOR THEM, I DID NOT *SUCCEED.*

*F.F. #34--RT.

"WE PARTED ON THE **BEST** OF TERMS--MY SON, THOMAS, HAD ACTED AS AN UNKNOWING **MEDIATOR** IN THAT DISPUTE--AND I EMBARKED ON A CALMING **VACATION** WITH THOMAS AND MY WIFE--AFTER WHICH I INTENDED TO **RENOUNCE** MY SUBSTANTIAL FORTUNE--!

"TO THIS DAY, I DON'T KNOW HOW **HOW IT HAPPENED**, YET SOME-HOW OUR PILOT **MISSED** ALL THE WARNING SIGNALS--

"--SIGNALS SENT FROM THE **TEST SIGHT** WE HAD **BLUNDERED** INTO --A TEST TAKING PLACE UNDER THE **UNITED NATIONS'** AUSPICES--

"--AND SO WE WERE COMPLETELY UNPRE-PARED WHEN WE FLEW IN THE PATH OF AN **EXPLODING ATOMIC BOMB!**

BADOOM!!

"SOMEHOW MY SON AND I **SURVIVED**, BUT THE OTHERS OF OUR PARTY WEREN'T SO **FORTUNATE**, INCLUDING--

CLAIRE!

"SHE WAS GONE-- MY WIFE WAS **GONE.**

"WE WERE PICKED UP BY A RUSSIAN TRAWLER WHICH WAS SUPERVISING THIS SO-CALLED "SAFE-BOMB" TEST...

"... SO "SAFE," THAT "ON THE WAY TO PORT, THREE OF ITS MEN **DIED** FROM RADIATION EXPOSURE...

"...AND FOR A TIME, IT SEEMED **WE** WOULD BE AS UNLUCKY, UNTIL...

--REPORTS ARE ALL ***NEGATIVE***, MR. GIDEON.

HOWEVER, RADIATION DECAY ***HAS*** SET IN...

DON'T TRY TO ***SPARE*** ME, DOCTOR.

I DIDN'T BECOME A BILLIONAIRE BY IGNORING ***REALITY.***

HERE IT ***IS***, THEN, MR. GIDEON: YOU AND YOUR SON HAVE APPROXIMATELY ***TWO YEARS***--YOUR ***SON*** A LITTLE ***LONGER***, BECAUSE OF HIS AGE.

THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN ***DO?***

NOTHING. I'M ***SORRY***, SIR.

DON'T BE. JUST ***GET OUT.***

"DURING THE FOLLOWING SIX MONTHS, I CONTINUED TO GROW ***WEAKER***-- BUT EVEN AS MY STRENGTH WANED, I ***STUDIED***--

"--FILLING MYSELF WITH KNOWLEDGE, LEARNING ALL I ***COULD*** ABOUT THE DISEASE WHICH AFFECTED ME.

"I TRIED A ***THOUSAND*** CURES... BUT ***NONE*** MET WITH SUCCESS.

"MY VERY ***ATOMIC STRUCTURE*** WAS COLLAPSING--AND I WAS ***HELPLESS.***

"FINALLY, EIGHT MONTHS AGO, FORCED BY MY WEAKENED CONDITION TO WEAR A LIFE-SUPPORTING ***BIOLOGICAL SHELL***, I HAD COME TO THE BRINK OF ***DESPAIR***...

"MY LIFE SEEMED AT AN ***END***... MY SON'S FUTURE WAS NO GLADDER THAN MY ***OWN***... AND NOT ALL MY WEALTH COULD ***SAVE*** ME...

"...UNTIL I THOUGHT... OF ***YOU!***"

TIME

PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

OR, MORE *ACCURATELY*, YOUR *FRIENDS.*

YEARS AGO THEIR ATOMIC STRUCTURES WERE *ALTERED*--TRANSFORMED BY *COSMIC RAYS.**

THEIR GENES--AND THE GENES OF THEIR *SON*--CAN REPLACE THE POWER DRAINING FROM MY *OWN*--

* *F.F.#1*--ROY.

--THOUGH OF COURSE IT WILL ULTIMATELY MEAN THEIR *DEATHS.*

MY SON AND I, HOWEVER, WILL *LIVE*--AND I--

--I SHALL HOLD *POWER*-- THE POWER OF A WORLD, IN THE PALM OF MY *HAND!*

"NO DOUBT YOU WONDER ABOUT THAT ANDROID *DRAGON.*

"WE FOUND HIM IN A *FREIGHT CAR,* WHERE HE'D BEEN PLACED BY THE *SUB-MARINER**--

L.S.

**SUBBY #15.* --RT

"--AND WE *FREED* HIM, KNOWING HIS CONNECTION WITH *MRS. RICHARDS,* AND THINKING IT MIGHT BE *USEFUL*--WHICH IT *WAS.*

CAREFUL WITH THAT GADGET-- BOSS SAID WE'D *NEED* IT.

SHUT UP.

I KNOW WHAT I'M *DOING.*

ONCE THAT DOOHICKEY'S IN PLACE, WE CAN *MANAGE* THIS MONSTER LIKE HE WAS A *BABE.*

HERE HE COMES *NOW*--ONE TOUCH OF THIS *SWITCH*--

--THE SIGNAL GOES *OUT*--

--AND HE'S GENTLE AS A LITTLE *DOG!*

AND *THAT,* MY DEAR MEDUSA--IS HOW THINGS *ARE.*

NEITHER YOU NOR YOUR FRIENDS WILL EVER AGAIN LEAVE THIS *CHAMBER.*

IT IS THE *ONLY WAY* --THAT MY SON AND I MIGHT *SURVIVE!*

IF YOU THINK *THAT,* GREGORY GIDEON--

--YOU ARE A *GREATER* FOOL THAN I *IMAGINED!*

*BUT, BEFORE WE LET OUR-SELVES BE DRAWN INTO STILL *ANOTHER* ANGRY EXCHANGE, LET'S SWITCH *SCENES*--FOR AN INTERLUDE IN MANHATTAN, AT THE *BAXTER BUILDING!*

WILL YOU *LOOK* AT THAT GUY?

MAYBE IT'S TIME I TOOK TO THE *GYM* AGAIN....!

*AND FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE *UNFAMILIAR* WITH THE FANTASTIC FOUR (ALL SIX OF YOU HIDING IN BOISE, IDAHO), THE BAXTER BUILDING'S WHERE THEY KEEP THEIR *HEADQUARTERS*..

--AND THE MAN IN THE GRAY *SUIT* IS THEIR POSTMAN-- *WILLIE LUMPKIN.*

HAVEN'T BEEN *DELIVERIN'* THE MAIL TO THE F.F. ALL THESE YEARS WITHOUT LEARNIN' WHAT SORT OF FOLK COME *CALLING.*

BIG FELLA'S IN FOR A *SHOCK,* THOUGH--

NOBODY GETS IN 'LESS REED RICHARDS *LETS* THEM--OR THEY GOT THE GADGET TO WORK THAT *PRIVATE ELEVATOR.*

AND *NOBODY* HAS THAT GA--

HUH.?

CAN YOU BEAT *THAT.?*

THOUGHT I KNEW *EVERYTHING* 'BOUT THOSE CRAZY SUPER-FOLKS...

I GUESS EVEN *WILLIE LUMPKIN* CAN BE WRONG-- ONCE OR *TWICE!*

MEANWHILE, IN A GARRET APARTMENT SEVERAL BLOCKS AWAY, ANOTHER MEMBER OF OUR PERIPATETIC CAST MAKES HER APPEARANCE...

...A BLIND SCULPTRESS BY THE NAME OF ALICIA MASTERS...

...WHO HAS A CERTAIN AFFECTION FOR AN ORANGE-SKINNED THING.

THIS IS THE THIRD DAY WITHOUT ANY WORD FROM BEN.

I'VE PHONED HIM TWICE--BUT THERE'S NO ANSWER.

I KNOW IT'S FOOLISH TO BE CONCERNED, BUT I CAN'T HELP MYSELF...

IN THESE PAST FEW YEARS, BEN HAS COME TO MEAN A GREAT DEAL TO ME...

...IF ANYTHING WERE TO HAPPEN TO HIM NOW, OF ALL TIMES...

OH, DARLING--HURRY BACK FROM WHEREVER YOU ARE.

I NEED YOU WITH ME--NOW--

--BECAUSE AFTER TOMORROW--

--I MAY NEVER HEAR YOUR VOICE--AGAIN!

JOHNNY STORM-- YOU MUST AWAKE, MY YOUNG FRIEND--AND QUICKLY.

THERE IS LITTLE TIME LEFT TO WASTE!

WHAZZAT-- LEF ME ALONE-- WHAZ HAPPENIN'--

HUH?

MEDUSA!

I GET THE FEELING I'VE COME IN ON THE MIDDLE OF A MOVIE!

WHAT'S GOING ON, RED?

QUICKLY, THE SCARLET-TRESSED INHUMAN EXPLAINS--AND THEN--

THE CONTROLS FOR THESE LASER-CAGES, JOHNNY--

THEY'RE NEXT TO YOUR CUBICLE!

SWELL. ANY SUGGESTIONS?

CAN YOU REACH THEM?

LADY, I CAN'T EVEN SEE THEM!

WHAT ABOUT YOU, BEN? THINK YOU CAN BREAK THROUGH THOSE LIGHT-BEAMS?

NOT A CHANCE, MATCH-HEAD... I'VE ALREADY TRIED.

IT'S YER MOVE, MEDUSA. YER THE ONE WITH THE RUBBER-BAND HAIR!

I REALIZE YOU'RE DISTRAUGHT, BENJAMIN GRIMM--SO I SHALL IGNORE THAT COMMENT!

AS FOR OUR HOSTS--THEY APPEAR AMPLY DISTRACTED--

--PROVIDING ME WITH A MOMENT'S *OPPORTUNITY* TO DO--

--THIS!

WHAT'S THE *IDEA,* MEDUSA?

YOU DON'T THINK YOU CAN PICK THESE LOCKS WITH A SLIVER OF *POLISHED STEEL,* DO YOU-

OH.

PARDON MY *STUPIDITY,* RED.

I THINK I FINALLY *SEE* WHAT YOU'RE GETTING AT--

--IF YOU'LL EXCUSE THE *PUN.*

PING!

SCRATCH!

BEN, I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU *SAID* IT.

NOW.?

NOW, OLD BUDDY.

LOOK OUT, TROOPS--

IT'S *CLOBBERIN'* TIME!

IDIOTS! YOU'VE LET THEM *ESCAPE!*

STOP THEM-- BEFORE THEY RUIN *EVERYTHING!*

LIKE PARTS OF A FINELY-TUNED FIGHTING MACHINE, THEY MOVE INTO ACTION--

--THING-- INHUMAN-- AND HUMAN TORCH: ONLY THREE-- OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

YOU HEARD THE BOSS--GET 'IM!

YEAH-- BUT HOW?

I AINT NEVER SEEN SOMEBODY MOVE LIKE THAT-- NEVER!

THEN YOU HAVEN'T SEEN AN INHUMAN NAMED MEDUSA, MY FRIEND--

--FOR IF YOU HAD--

--YOU'D NEVER HAVE BEEN FOOL ENOUGH TO CAPTURE HER!

RIGHT, BRIGHT LADY!

WE'D HAVE KNOWN ENOUGH TA KILL YA OFF THE BAT--

--INSTEAD'A WAITING TO DO IT NOW-- WHICH WE WILL!

SORRY, MAXWELL... BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET THE CHANCE.

WE TEAM-MATES ARE A LITTLE TOUCHY ABOUT GUYS TRYING TO WIPE OUT OUR FRIENDS...

YOU COULD SAY... IT BURNS US UP!

EEEYYOWW!

HE'S SET THE FREAKIN' FLOOR ON FIRE!

LOOKS LIKE YA HIRED CREEPS AINT DOIN' *TOO WELL*, MONEY-MAN.

WHAT SAY YOU AN' ME TIE THIS UP REAL *QUICK*-- OKAY?

I REALLY *HATE* LONG *GOODBYES!*

THEN YOURS SHALL BE *BRIEF*, YOU BLUNDERING FOOL!

HABOOM!

HAS YOUR PITIABLE MIND *FORGOTTEN*--?

I HOLD THE POWER OF REED AND SUE RICHARDS WITHIN THIS ARMORED *SHELL*--

I AM STRONGER THAN *YOU*-- THAN *ANYONE!*

IN A *PIG'S EYE*, CURLY-TOP!

FATHER!
WHEN I DIDN'T FIND YOU AT YOUR OFFICE, I THOUGHT YOU--
NO!
NO!
COME ON, KID--
YER OLD MAN'S BUSY!
HE CAN'T --HE CAN'T!
HE PROMISED HE WOULDN'T TRY TO HURT THEM ANYMORE--
--HE PROMISED!
WHATSA-MATTER?
AINT YA EVER HEARD-- PROMISES ARE FOR BREAKING?
OR DON'TCHA CARE YER KID'S BEIN' MANHANDLED BY A PAIR OF BOZOS?
YER A REAL SWEET-HEART, GID.
MY SON IS MY BUSINESS, THING!
MY BUSINESS!
AND YOUR BUSINESS, MY FRIEND--
--IS TO DIE!
KRAK!
DOWN!
WHY NOT ADMIT YOUR DEFEAT, THING? WHY NOT BEG ME TO LET YOU LIVE?
I MIGHT, YOU KNOW--
--IF YOU CRAWL FOR MERCY!
DON'T HOLD YER BREATH, CUTE-UMS.
I MAY BE DOWN--
--BUT BROTHER, I AINT OUT!

KEEP *KICKING*, BENJY.! AS SOON AS I GET OUT FROM UNDER MY *OWN* PROBLEMS--

--I'LL BE ON MY *WAY!*

BLAT!

SPLUNCH!

YOU HAVEN'T GOT A *CHANCE*, STORM.!

MR. GIDEON HAD THIS DEVICE MADE TO *ORDER* BY HIS PRIVATE *WEAPONS PLANT!*

NO *KIDDING?*

SPRAK!

WOW...FOR A *WHILE* THERE, I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST ANOTHER PIECE OF *JUNK!*

FOOM!

DO YOU *FEEL* IT, THING?

YOUR VERY *LIFE-FORCE* --EBBING FROM *WITHIN* YOU?

YOU ARE *DYING*--

--AND IN A MATTER OF *MOMENTS* --YOUR STRENGTH WILL BE *MINE!*

I HAVE TO *STOP* HIM... BUT *HOW?*

WAIT! DRAGON-MAN... IN THE CONFUSION OF BATTLE, WE'D FORGOTTEN ABOUT HIM *COMPLETELY!*

ONLY *HE* CAN SAVE BENJAMIN GRIMM...

...BUT TO DO *THAT*... HE HIMSELF MUST FIRST BE *FREED*...

...AND I PRAY TO *AGRON* THAT I HAVE THE SKILL... TO DO WHAT MUST BE *DONE!*

LIKE MANY-JOINTED FINGERS, THE LIVING TENDRILS OF MEDUSA'S HAIR MOVE DELICATELY THROUGH A PLATE ON DRAGON-MAN'S SKULL--

--AND WITH A DEFTNESS THE FINEST OF SURGEONS WOULD ADMIRE--

--SHE REMOVES THE SONIC CONTROLLER FROM THE ANDROID'S UNCONSCIOUS BRAIN!

FOR A MOMENT, THE DRAGON-MAN REMAINS SLEEPING...

...AND THEN... PONDEROUSLY...

...THE DRAGON-MAN WAKES!

SURRENDER, YOU MINDLESS IMBECILE!

I COMMAND YOU TO BEG FOR YOUR LIFE!

YA KNOW SUMTHIN', PAL? WHEN YA WERE DOIN' THIS FER YER SON-- I COULD ALMOST ADMIRE YA--

--BUT NOW YER JUST ANOTHER NUT CRAZY FER POWER!

AND MISTER--I HAVE THAT KIND FER BREAKFAST!

WHAK!

YOU'LL REGRET THAT MOVE, BENJAMIN GRIMM...BUT YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT POWER!

WHAT NEED HAVE I FOR THE EMOTIONS OF MEN--I, WHOSE BODY CONTAINS THE FULL ENERGIES OF THE ETERNITY MACHINE?

THAT PART OF MY LIFE IS OVER-- FOR NOW I--

EH?

OUT OF MY WAY, PUPPET!

ARE YOU DEAF, ANIMAL? YOUR MASTER COMMANDS YOU-- OBEY ME!

I SAID TO GET OUT OF MY--

CHUNK!

RAWWRRRR!

IN THE END, THEY COULD ONLY WONDER:

WAS IT LOVE FOR SUE RICHARDS WHICH DROVE THE MONSTER TO ITS DEATH?

OR WAS IT ONLY BLIND--UNTHINKING RAGE AT THE MAN WHO'D SOUGHT TO ENSLAVE IT?

IF THE MONSTER COULD SPEAK--PERHAPS IT WOULD HAVE TOLD.

BUT AS THINGS STOOD, IT HAD ONLY ONE MEANS OF EXPRESSION--

--AND PERHAPS THE REASON DOESN'T MATTER, AFTER ALL.

FRANKLIN...

...ARE YOU... ALL RIGHT...?

SURE, SUZIE... YER KID'S *OKAY.*

DON'TCHA KNOW... EVERYTHING ALWAYS WORKS OUT IN THE *END.?*

EPILOGUE:

HEY, SIS-- THIS IS *GREAT!*

WE'RE BACK *TOGETHER* AGAIN--EVERYTHING'S LIKE IT WAS *BEFORE!*

REED'LL BE REAL GLAD TA *SEE* YA, KID.

AN' *MY* EYES AINT HURTING *EITHER!*

OH, BEN... JOHNNY...YOU JUST DON'T *UNDERSTAND.*

NOTHING'S *CHANGED*... I STILL FEEL THE WAY I FELT *BEFORE.* I HAVE TO WORK THINGS OUT *MYSELF...*

...I LOVE REED *TOO MUCH* TO DO ANYTHING *LESS.*

IT WOULDN'T BE FAIR TO *HIM...* OR TO *FRANKLIN*...TO LET AN *ACCIDENT* BRING US TOGETHER AGAIN.

SO PLEASE... DON'T TELL HIM WE WERE *HERE.*

I THINK IT WOULD BE *BETTER* IF HE DOESN'T KNOW...

...HOW CLOSE WE'VE *COME...* AND HOW FAR WE'VE YET TO *GO.*

THE END

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ CC | 136 JULY 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

C'MON, YOU COSTUMED PIKERS! YOU WANT POWER?

I'LL SHOW YOU POWER!!

THE WILD ONE COMETH!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

ROCK AROUND THE COSMOS!

THE BATTLE IS OVER--BUT NOT **QUITE** FORGOTTEN. LITTLE **TIME** HAS PASSED SINCE THE MAN CALLED GIDEON MET HIS DEATH TRYING TO **DESTROY** THE F.F...

...BUT, IN THAT TIME, SUE RICHARDS HAS ONCE **AGAIN** LEFT HER HUSBAND AND FRIENDS, TAKING HER **INFANT SON** WITH HER...

...AND LEAVING HER FORMER TEAM-MATES IN A PAINFUL **QUANDRY.**

STRETCHO'S STILL OUT **COLD.**

EITHER OF YA FIGURED OUT WHAT TO **TELL** HIM WHEN HE COMES TO?

THE SITUATION'S MORE SERIOUS THAN YOU **REALIZE,** THING! IT'S NOT WHEN-- **IT'S IF!**

1476 Z

GERRY CONWAY *SCRIPTER* / JOHN BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT *ARTISTS* / ARTIE SIMEK, *LETTERER* STAN G., *COLORIST* / *STORY CONCEIVED, PLOTTED & EDITED BY:* ROY THOMAS

MEDUSA'S *RIGHT,* BEN. REED'S BEEN UNCONSCIOUS PRETTY *LONG.*

WHO KNOWS *WHAT* GIDEON'S CRAZY MACHINES MIGHT HAVE *DONE* TO HIM.?

SUE'S QUICK RECOVERY MIGHT HAVE BEEN AN *ACCIDENT!*

I'VE *GOT* TO GET THESE GENERATORS *WORKING* AGAIN--!

STARTING UP THAT BLASTED *RAY-DEVICE* GIDEON WANTED TO PUT US ALL UNDER *COULD* BE REED'S ONLY *CHANCE!*

THEN STOP YAPPIN' AN' KEEP *WORKIN,'* HOT-SHOT!

THIS AINT NO *KINDERGARTEN GAME--*

THAT'S OUR EGG-HEADED *BUDDY* UP THERE.!

I'M *TRYING,* BEN--BUT I'M NOT SURE IF MY FLAME'S *STRONG* ENOUGH.!

GIDEON USED AN *ATOMIC PLANT--*

I'LL HAVE TO BUILD MY FLAME TO *NOVA INTENSITY,* AND *PRAY* THAT--

I *DID* IT.!

I *DID* IT.!

FOOM!

ALL RIGHT, YA *DID* IT.

SHEESH! FER ONCE IN YER LIFE YA PULLED SUMTHIN' OFF--AN' *ALREADY* YA WANT A BLAMED *MEDAL!*

HEY--AH, RED--DID IT *WORK?*

IS REED *OKAY?*

SUE, DARLING...?

I WAS *DREAMING* ABOUT YOU...THE STRANGEST DREAM...

SUE...I...

REED...IT'S *MEDUSA.*

MEDUSA? BUT WHERE'S--?
OH.
I SEE.
IT'S ALWAYS THIS WAY.
FOR THE FIRST FEW MINUTES EACH MORNING--I CAN'T REALLY BELIEVE SHE'S GONE, UNTIL--
H--HEY, LISTEN, STRETCH--YOU KNOW THAT PROBLEM WE WUZ HAVIN' WITH THAT FELLA GIDEON?
WELL...IT AINT A PROBLEM ANYMORE...
WE SOLVED IT.
THAT'S HIM THERE...
...AN' HE'S DEAD.
THAT ANDROID CREEP YA CALL DRAGON MAN WASTED HIM WHEN HE TRIED TA ATTACK--AH--MEDUSA.*
DRAGON MAN BOUGHT IT, TOO.
*IT WAS REALLY SUE--AND IT HAPPENED LAST ISSUE. --ROY.
DRAGON MAN.? BUT I THOUGHT HE CAPTURED--
NO. IT MUST HAVE BEEN A MISTAKE.
IF SHE WAS EVER HERE--SUE WOULD BE HERE NOW.
ONE THING'S CERTAIN, AT ANY RATE.
OUR WINGED FRIEND IS DEAD--IF AN ANDROID CAN EVER TRULY DIE.
IF ONLY WE COULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD HIM--
--BUT IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT, NOW. FAR TOO LATE.

YOU'RE GREGORY GIDEON'S **SON**, AREN'T YOU?

MY NAME'S **THOMAS**, MR. RICHARDS.

I'M **SORRY** ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED HERE, THOMAS.

YOUR **FATHER**--

--WAS **DYING.** WE **BOTH** WERE.

HE TRIED TO **HIDE** IT FROM ME--

--BUT I KNEW ALL **ALONG.**

RADIATION SICKNESS, MR. RICHARDS ...IT DROVE HIM **MAD.**

LATER, SON.

WHEN WE JOIN UP WITH BEN AND JOHNNY AT THE **BAXTER BUILDING**, WE'LL **TALK** ABOUT YOUR PROBLEM--

MAYBE WE CAN **CURE** YOU.

WE OWE IT TO YOU, TO **TRY.**

AND AT LAST, ALL IS SILENT IN THE PRIVATE RESEARCH LABORATORY OF THE LATE GREGORY GIDEON.

AND YET...ALL IS NOT STILL.

AMIDST THE DEBRIS OF BATTLE, SEVERAL HUMAN FORMS LIE BEATEN AND UNMOVING--THE HENCHMEN HIRED BY GREGORY GIDEON TO IMPLEMENT HIS TWISTED PLANS.

ONE OF THESE HENCHMEN NOW WAKES--

--AND HIS STORY BEGINS:

MAN, OH **MAN,** SLUGGER...HAVE **YOU** GOT A HEADACHE....!

NOR IS THIS ALL SLUGGER HAS--FOR, STRUCK BY THE ODD RAYS CAST EARLIER BY GIDEON'S STRANGE MACHINE DURING ITS REACTIVATION--

--HIS BODY IS SUFFUSED WITH AN UNEARTHLY **GLOW**--OF WHICH HE IS BLITHELY **UNAWARE!**

LOOKS LIKE **OUR** SIDE **LOST.**

FACE IT, SLUGGER-- YOU BOMBED OUT **AGAIN.**

FROM THE **LOOK** OF THINGS--THIS TURF'S **HOT.**

GOTTA FIGURE AN ANGLE TO GET **OUTTA** HERE--

--BEFORE I'M SPOTTED BY THE **FUZZ.**

THE WAY MY **LUCK'S** BEEN HOLDING, **I'LL** CATCH THE BLAME FOR THIS MESS.

WISH THINGS WERE LIKE THEY WUZ IN THE **FIFTIES--**

"--WHEN ME AN' THE **OTHER** J.D.'s USED TA HANG OUT 'ROUND **POP DANVER'S** JOINT--

"--EYEIN' THE BROADS AND FIGURIN' ON WAYS TO SCORE THE **REAL** PAYOLA. YEAH, **THOSE** WERE THE DAYS--CHUGALUGGIN' BEER AN DIGGIN' OL' **ELVIS.**

"FUNNY HOW IT ALL SORTA **ENDED** IN '58, WHEN I FINALLY PULLED A PASSIN' GRADE AND GRADUATED **HIGH SCHOOL--!**

"FUNNY. IT ALL WENT **DOWNHILL,** LIKE A BIKER ON A **SPIN.**

"ALL I COULD GET WERE **ODD JOBS--** GARAGE MECHANIC, BUM WORK LIKE **THAT--**

"--UNTIL I READ THAT **AD** IN THE CLASSIFIED SECTION OF THE **DAILY BUGLE**--ABOUT SOMEONE NEEDIN' A **BODY-GUARD** WHO DIDN'T CARE ABOUT 'TRADITIONAL LEGALITIES!

"I KNEW WHAT **THAT** MEANT-- AND I WAS ALL **FOR** IT--

--AN' LOOK WHERE IT'S **GOT** ME.

I'M IN **MORE** HOT WATER THAN I EVER WUZ WITH--

HUH?

SOME SORT'A **GLOW** BEHIND ME--?

AT LAST...MY WANDERINGS ARE OVER.

I HAVE FOUND A MORTAL WHOSE DREAMS ARE WORTHY OF LIFE!

I-I MUST BE GOIN' CRACKERS!

SUMTHIN'S APPEARING-- RIGHT OUT OF THE AIR!

NOT SOMETHING, SLUGGER JOHNSON... SOMEONE!

MEN CALL ME THE SHAPER*--

--HE WHO MAKES DREAMS LIVE!

IT IS MY POWER-- AND MY CURSE--TO BE WITHOUT A NATIVE IMAGINATION-- YET TO BURN WITH A CEASELESS DESIRE TO CREATE--!

*THE SHAPER OF WORLDS-- FIRST SEEN IN HULK #155. --RT.

FOR MANY MONTHS I HAVE WANDERED--SEARCHING FOR A CREATURE WHOSE DREAMS HAD SUFFICIENT ENERGY FOR MY HAND TO GIVE THEM REALITY.

FINALLY--IN YOU--I HAVE FOUND THAT ENERGY--

--AND NOW IT SHALL BE RELEASED!

H-HEY--!

SLUGGER JOHNSON HARDLY FEELS THE ENERGY BEING SAPPED FROM HIS BODY--

FOR, UNTIL MERE MOMENTS AGO-- THAT ENERGY WAS NOT HIS--

--AND NOW, IS HIS NO LONGER--AS IT SPREADS OUTWARD--

OUTWARD--LIKE RIPPLES IN A POND--

--OVER LONG ISLAND, KNOWN FOR ITS TRAINS, SUBURBS, AND MINOR INSANITIES.

AND, AS THE CONCENTRIC RINGS OF ENERGY SPREAD --THEY TOUCH THE LIVES OF THE GREAT AND SMALL...

THEY TOUCH, FOR EXAMPLE, A FATHER AND HIS ESTRANGED SON--

--WHO HARDLY REALIZE THAT THE BATTLE THEY FIGHT IS NOT A NEW ONE--

--A SORRY FACT THEY'RE SOON TO LEARN RATHER PAINFULLY!

OUTWARD--LIKE RIPPLES IN A POND--

--OVER SCHOOLS AND SUPERMARKETS--HOMES AND HOSPITALS--

OUTWARD--TOUCHING AND CHANGING--

--CONTINUING TO SPREAD--UNTIL IT REACHES A CERTAIN JETTING FANTASTICAR, AND ITS COMPANION CRAFT, PILOTED BY THE THING--

--AND IT'S THEN THAT ALL CHAOS BREAKS LOOSE!

THE CONTROLS--SOMETHING'S WRONG! I-I CAN'T WORK THEM!

LEVERS AND SWITCHES--ALL THIS EQUIP-MENT--

THERE'S SO MUCH TO KNOW--

--AND I CAN'T REMEMBER!

SKREEWHUMP!

BEN--WHAT HAPPENED? WHY'D YOU LET GO OF THE CONTROLS?

DON'T YOU SEE WE'RE FALLI--

UNNNGH!

GHUMP!

FOR SEVERAL MINUTES THE FALLEN QUINTET LIE STUNNED. THEN, SLOWLY, CONSCIOUSNESS RETURNS--AND WITH IT, A FORM OF CURIOSITY.

WH-WHAT HAPPENED TO US?

IF THAT TREE HADN'T BROKEN MY FALL--I'D BE PANCAKED!

ALL OF A SUDDEN--I FORGOT HOW TO FLAME ON! I--

MEDUSA!

IS THOMAS OKAY? WAS HE HURT BY THE FALL?

HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT, JOHNNY. HE'S JUST DAZED.

AN INSTANT BEFORE WE LANDED, REED MANAGED TO SHIELD HIM--AS MUCH AS HE COULD.

HE DID, HUH?

IF REED HADN'T FOULED UP, THOMAS WOULDN'T NEED--

BEN! MEDUSA!

IN THE NAME OF ALL THAT'S HOLY--

LOOK!

HIT 'EM!

THOSE FLAT-TOPS THOUGHT THEY COULD HOLD THAT JOINT FOREVER--

--BUT THAT WUZ BEFORE THEY RAN INTA THE WILD ONES!

SPEEKOW!

SPEEKOW!

STOP JAWIN' AND STIFF THOSE GOLDEN OLDIES--!

SPEEKOW!

THEY'VE HELD THIS TURF LONG ENOUGH!

NOW IT'S OUR TURN!

HOODS-- ON FLYING BIKES?

WHERE DID THEY COME FROM? AND THAT PLACE THEY'RE ATTACKING--

YA WOULDN'T REMEMBER, KID--YER TOO BLAMED YOUNG.

EITHER I'M GOIN' BANANAS, OR THAT'S--

A FALLOUT SHELTER!

HEY, MOON-- LOOKS LIKE WE GOT COMPANY!

MORE FLAT-TOP SQUARES DOWN BELOW--AND THEY'RE JUST BEGGING FOR TROUBLE!

THEN LET'S RIDE 'EM DOWN!

EVERY DEAD STRAIGHT'S A GOOD STRAIGHT-- AM I RIGHT?

SAY WHEN, MOON!

NOW!

THEY'RE FIRING AT US--

SOME SORT OF GREEN RAY!

SPEEKOW!

SPEEKOW!

I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU YOUNGSTERS ARE--

--BUT ONE THING'S CERTAIN--

NO ONE SHOOTS DOWN THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

THAT'S SHOWIN' 'EM, HIGH-POCKETS.

WHOEVER THESE PUNKS ARE--THEY MAKE THE YANCY STREET GANG LOOK LIKE REAL PUSSYCATS!

SPEEKOW!

--BUT THEY'RE ALL GOIN' ON A TRIP--

--TA SLEEPY-BYE LAND!

WHUMP!

WISH WE COULD GET TA KNOW 'EM BETTER--

WE CAN'T JUST *STAND BY,* MEDUSA--WE'VE GOT TO *HELP* THEM!

THEY DON'T HAVE A *CHANCE* WITHOUT US!

FLAME ON!

MEDUSA! WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO *DO?*

YOUR *HAIR*--IT'S PULLING ME *BACK*--

--STRANG-LING ME!

THAT'S *ONE* CHICK WHO KNOWS WHOSE *SIDE* SHE'S ON, DAD!

THAT HOOD'S *RIGHT.*

WE CAN'T LET YOU *BEAT* ON THEM, GRIMM--

--THEY'RE OUR KIND!

BUNK!

YER JUST TURNIN' INTO A CRUMMY *J.D.!* I ALWAYS KNEW YA HAD IT *IN* YA, MATCH-HEAD--

BA DA

--BUT I NEVER THOUGHT YA'D LET IT OUT!

BOOM!

ON YOUR TOES, TROOPS!

WE GOTTA SPLIT OUTTA HERE *FAST,* 'CAUSE--

WHAM

--HERE COMES THE FUZZ!

SWOOSH!

SWOOSH!

SWOOSH!

AFTER THEM, MEN.!

WE'VE GOT THOSE *RED DEVILS* ON THE *RUN.!*

AIM YOUR *WEAPONS*--

FIRE!

JOHNNY! *HELP ME--!*

MEDUSA--

--TRAPPED BY-- *ATOMIC HULA HOOPS!?*

HANG TIGHT, RED!

THOSE *HOOPS* WON'T HOLD YOU LONG, ONCE I--

DON'T *SWEAT IT,* PAL.!

THE BROAD'LL BE REAL *SAFE*--

--AND YOU, *TOO,* IF YA GOT BRAINS ENOUGH TA KEEP YOUR *FLAP* SHUT AND FOLLOW *ME!*

HEAR WHAT I'M *TELLIN'* YA?

I *HEAR,* "PAL"!

JOHNNY-- WHERE'S *THOMAS--?*

GIDEON'S KID? HE'S *FINE,* RED.

LOOKS LIKE WE'RE *ALL* PRESENT-- AND *ACCOUNTED* FOR.!

CONFUSED, GENTLE READER?

NO MORE THAN THE OTHER MEMBERS OF OUR FORMER FOURSOME...

A BRAVE BATTLE, FELLA.

DON'T BELIEVE I'VE HAD THE PLEASURE--?

THE NAME'S RICHARDS. REED RICHARDS.

WHO--?

KONE, FELLA-- JOE KONE.

I'M ONE OF THE CHIEF PROTECTORS FOR THE NATION.

MAYBE YOU'D BETTER COME WITH US-- HMM?

SAY THE WORD, STRETCH--

LATER, BEN.

FOR NOW--I THINK WE'D BETTER GO.

THE SHAPER'S HAND IS APPARENT IN THIS WORLD WE NOW SEE BEFORE US--APPARENT TO THOSE WHO KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR...

...A GROUP WHICH DOES NOT INCLUDE REED RICHARDS AND BENJAMIN GRIMM--

--AND SO, THEY CAN ONLY STARE ABOUT THEM IN WONDER, AS--

I'M SURPRISED YOU HAVEN'T HEARD OF US, FELLAS.

IT MAKES ME KIND OF WONDER--

THIS IS THE NATION-- AND THESE ARE THE PATRIOTS.

--ARE YOU NOW, OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN-- A MEMBER OF THE YOUTH PARTY?

REMEMBER, GENTLEMEN-- YOU ARE UNDER OATH!

HEY, STRETCHO-- WHAT IS THIS, ANYWAY?

SOME KINDA NUT FACTORY?

SHEESH!

YOUTHIES!
IT'S JUST LIKE THE SENATOR SAID!
THAT J.D. PROPAGANDA IS EVERYWHERE!
KILL THEM! KILL THEM!
KILL THEM!

ENOUGH!
APPARENTLY OUR GUESTS ARE STRANGERS TO OUR SHORES-- HELPLESS FOREIGNERS, INNOCENT OF OUR WAYS!
SEND THEM TO ME FOR QUESTION-ING--

WE'LL SOON SET THEM STRAIGHT!
KONE, THAT VOICE--WHO WAS THAT?
McHAMMER! HE WANTS TO SEE YOU!
WILL SOMEBODY EXPLAIN TO ME WHAT'S GOIN' ON AROUND HERE?

McHAMMER WILL EXPLAIN-- HE'S THE SENATOR.
AND THE SENATOR IS OUR LEADER-- OUR PROTECTOR!
KONE, LOOK OUT--!

ODD. KONE DIDN'T SEEM TO SEE THAT BLACK MAN--AS THOUGH THE BLACK WERE--AN INVISIBLE MAN.
I THINK... I'M BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND...!

IF TRUE, REED RICHARDS IS CERTAINLY ONE JUMP AHEAD OF MEDUSA AND JOHNNY STORM, WHO FIND THEMSELVES IN THE HANDS OF A GROUP OF FLYING MOTORCYCLE HOODS--
--AND ARE UNABLE TO GUESS THE NATURE OF THE GAME AROUND THEM!

JOHNNY, I'VE SEEN PICTURES OF PLACES LIKE THIS--
IT'S CALLED A MALT SHOP, MEDUSA.
USED TO BE A LOT OF THEM AROUND--DURING THE FIFTIES.
THE 1950's? BUT HOW--?

ROCK AROUND THE COSMOS--
ROCK AROUND THE BLOCK--
ROCK, ROCK, ROCK--
THE MUSIC! IT'S SO LOUD--
IT'S--IT'S KILLING ME!
DON'T YOU SEE WHAT IT'S *DOING* TO HER?

FUTCH!
IF YOU DON'T STOP IT--I WILL!

HEY, AH, MAN-- THAT WASN'T VERY *HEP.*
AH, YA WANT I SHOULD BUST YA *TEETH* FOR YA?
TRY IT, MEAT-MIND!
CUT THE *GAS,* LENNY.

I GOT A FEELIN' THE *WILDMAN'S* GONNA WANTA SEE *GOLDEN BOY* HERE.
LET'S TAKE A *WALK,* BLONDIE.
ARE YOU *OKAY,* RED.?
I *THINK* SO, JOHNNY...

...BUT WHAT *IS* THIS PLACE... WHAT'S *HAPPENING* TO US.?
I DON'T *KNOW,* MEDUSA, I CAN'T EVEN UNDERSTAND WHY WE ATTACKED *REED* AND *BEN!*
IT *LOOKS* LIKE WE'VE WALKED INTO SOMEONE'S *NIGHTMARE* OF THE *FIFTIES!*

SO *THAT'S* THE NEW BIKER, HUH, GREASE-BALL.?
DON'T LOOK LIKE MUCH OF A HOOD TA *ME.*
WILDMAN'S GONNA HAVE A *BALL* WITH THAT CHUMP.
AND THAT DAME *WITH* HIM--DIG HER *MOP.*
JOHNNY, I DON'T LIKE THE *SOUND* OF THIS.
ALL OF THESE PEOPLE-- THEY'RE JUST *KIDS*--AND THEY'RE SO *STRANGE!*
WATCH YER *MOUTH,* BROAD.
WILDMAN AINT GONNA *DIG* THAT KINDA *GARBAGE!*

I DON'T *GET* IT-- WHO'S THIS *WILDMAN* YOU KEEP TALKING ABOUT?

PAL, HAVE YOU BEEN LIVIN' IN ANOTHER *UNIVERSE?*

HE'S OUR *ELVIS*--OUR *BRANDO*-- OUR VERY OWN HEAD *DEAN!*

HE'S THE MAN WHO'S GONNA DECIDE WHAT TO *DO* WITH YOU! HE'S--

WILDMAN!

*FROM SOMEWHERE COMES THE FAINTEST STRUMMING OF AN ELECTRIC **GUITAR.***

*A WHISPER-- AS SOFT AS A REVVING **MOTORCYCLE--***

*--AS GENTLE AS THE SCREAM OF A VICTIM IN **PAIN!***

NOW, IF I AINT A LOVE-SICK *HOUND DOG!*

WHAT *HAVE* WE HERE? SEEMS I'VE SEEN THOSE PRETTY FACES *BEFORE--*

--BUT I JUST CAN'T REMEMBER *WHERE!* *

*TAKE A **CLOSE** LOOK-- AND THEN FLIP BACK TO **PAGE 7**, AND TELL US WHAT YOU **SEE!** --SNEAKY ROY.

THE BOYS TELL ME YOU'RE *NEW--*

--AN' WHILE THAT AINT EXACTLY A *CRIME--*

--IT *IS* KINDA *SUSPICIOUS!*

SOOOO-- MEET YER *INTERRO-GATORS--*

--THE TWO BEST *DISK JOCKEYS* IN THE WHOLE WILD AND WOOLLY *WESTERN HEMISPHERE.*

HIYA HIYA *HIYA,* KIDDIES AND KOOL KATS--

WANNA STUFF A *PHONE BOOTH!?*

JOHNNY...WHAT DOES IT ALL *MEAN?*

I THINK I *UNDER-STAND* NOW, RED...

DO YA.? WELL, THEN, MAYBE YOU CAN ANSWER A FEW QUESTIONS ON OUR NUMBER ONE NATIONAL QUIZ PARADE!

LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN TELL US WHICH BEACH BIKINI BINGO BOMB THIS TIP-TAPPIN' TUNE HAILS FROM, SWEENEY!

TAKE IT AWAY, FABIAN!

SPWARK!

--THIS TRIBUNAL COMMITTEE IS NOW IN SESSION.

AS CHAIRMAN--AND AS CHIEF PROTECTOR AND SENATOR FOR THE NATION--I AM OBLIGED TO ASK YOU THE $64,000 QUESTION--

ARE YOU A YOUTHIE SYMPATHIZER?

CAREFUL WITH YOUR ANSWER.

THOSE ISOLATION BOOTHS CAN BE PAINFUL.

HEY, NOW NANNY NANNY AND A HI HI HO, CHUM.!

YOU'RE NOT PLAYIN' FAIR--

--I DON'T HEAR THOSE SNAPPY COMEBACKS!

T-- THAT MUSIC--

ITS--ALMOST HYPNOTIC--!

WE'RE WAITING, RICHARDS. DO YOU WANT TO BE HELD IN CONTEMPT OF CONGRESS?

ARE YOU A YOUTHIE-- OR NOT?

THERE'S SOME FORM OF VIBRATION MECHANISM AT WORK IN THESE BOOTHS--

--SUBTLE--ALMOST SUB-SONIC-- BUT WHY--?

C'MON, SISTER-- YOU CAN TELL OL' ROGER THE B!

WHEN DID THE PELVIS RECORD HIS FIRST HIT?

TELL ME! TELL ME!

TELL ME TELL ME

--THE ANSWER, BENJAMIN GRIMM!

TELL ME WHAT I WANT TO HEAR!

H-HEY, BIG WORDS-- THIS BOOTH'S GETTING PRETTY HOT--

CAN'T-- CAN'T GET CONTROL-- CAN'T--

TELL ME

SLOWLY, IT BEGINS TO HAPPEN:

FIRST, ALL **WILL TO RESIST** LEAVES OUR HEROES' MINDS AND BODIES, AS, UNDER THE CEASELESS BARRAGE OF **SOUND**--AND **SONIC VIBRATION**--

--THE TWO SEPARATE **TEAMS** FIND THEMSELVES **BUCKLING UNDER** TO THEIR QUESTIONEERS--

--AND FIND THE QUESTIONS **THEMSELVES** TO BE CHANGING!

WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF **THE BRAIN!**

TELL US WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT **THE BRAIN!**

GRADUALLY THE PICTURE **UNFOLDS:**

EACH GROUP OF HEROES **LEARNS** ABOUT THE MYSTERIOUS "**BRAIN**"--A HYBERNETIC **GENIUS** WHO HAS DEVELOPED AN ALL-POWERFUL **WEAPON**, WHICH HE KEEPS **SAFE** FROM SEIZURE WITHIN HIS **FORTRESS STRONGHOLD**--

--A WEAPON CRAVED BY **BOTH CAMPS**, YOUTHS AND PATRIOTS ALIKE--

--AND THE CAPTURE OF WHICH WILL BE A **TEST**--FOR OUR ALMOST COMPLETELY **BRAINWASHED FOURSOME!**

TOO MUCH.

LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE **ALL YOURS**, WILDMAN.

I'VE DONE AS MUCH FOR THEM AS I **CAN!**

WELL, GENTLEMEN --IT APPEARS OUR GUESTS ARE **READY.**

REMOVE THEM FROM THE **BOOTHS.**

WHERE'S THE *ACTION*, WILDMAN?

WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO *DO*?

NAME IT, MISTER--

JUST NAME IT!

LISTEN TO ME-- I WANT THE *BRAIN'S WEAPON*--

--AND WE DON'T CARE WHAT YOU DO TO *GET* IT, MY FRIENDS.

YOUR POWERS SEEM *PHENOMENAL*, SO I AM *SURE*--

--YOU'LL HAVE NO *PROBLEM* WITH THAT OLD GEEZER.

JUST WATCH OUT FOR HIS CREEPO *GUARD*--A PUNK MONSTER HE'S GOT UNDER HIS *THUMB*--

--A DEVIATE CREATURE CALLED THE *WARHEAD!*

BIG DEAL, MCHAMMER--

I'D LIKE TA SEE *ANYONE* GET IN THE WAY OF--*THE THING!*

WE HAVE NO *TIME* FOR BOASTING! WE MUST *HURRY*--

--BEFORE THE *OTHERS* GET INTO THE ACT--

--AND IF THEY *DO*--

--AND WE HAVE TO WIPE THEM *OUT!*

YOU *SAID* IT, FLAME-BOY--

--CRUSH THEM--

--DESTROY THEM--

KILL THEM ALL!!

NEXT ISSUE **RUMBLE ON PLANET 3!**

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ CC | 137 AUG 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

TM

REED! BEN'S DOWN-- AND NOW THAT CREEP'S GOT MEDUSA!

DON'T GIVE UP, TORCH-- NO MATTER WHAT!

IF WE FALL-- THE WORLD IS FINISHED!

WHERE WALKS WAR-HEAD!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

RUMBLE ON PLANET 3

THIS IS THE WORLD THE **SHAPER** MADE:

A WORLD LOST IN **TIME** AS WELL AS **PLACE**, FOREVER **LOCKED** IN THE FIFTH DECADE OF THE **TWENTIETH CENTURY**. OR SO IT **SEEMED**, ONE HOUR AGO!

NOW, A **NEW** ASPECT OF THIS 1950s MADHOUSE HAS REVEALED ITSELF... BRINGING ITS **OWN** MYSTERY TO THESE TWO HARRIED HEROES.

HEY, *STRETCHO*. IF THIS IS SUPPOSED TA BE *1958*--

WHAT IN THE NAME'A SAM HILL IS *THAT*?

ON INITIAL INSPECTION, BEN, IT SEEMS TO BE A *MEDIEVAL CASTLE*.

ODD.

"*ODD*", HUH? Y'KNOW SUMTHIN', REED? I ALWAYS *FIGGERED* YOU HAD A WAY WITH *BIG WORDS*.

15302

GERRY CONWAY * *SCRIPTER*
JOHN BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT * *ARTISTS EXTRAORDINAIRE*
ARTIE SIMEK, *LETTERER* * GLYNIS WEIN, *COLORIST*
STORY CONCEIVED AND EDITED BY: ROY THOMAS

QUIET, BEN... I'M THINKING.

DON'T LET IT HURT YER HEAD, HIGH-POCKETS.

WHATEVER INDOCTRINATION WE RECEIVED AT THE HANDS OF McHAMMER AND HIS MEN* SEEMS TO HAVE FADED--

--BUT WE STILL HAVE TO ENTER THAT CASTLE.

HOW YA FIGGER THAT?

*LAST ISH. --RT.

DON'T YOU SEE, BEN?

WE HAVE TO DISCOVER WHAT'S BEHIND ALL THIS.

OTHERWISE WE CAN ONLY ACT AS PAWNS IN A CHESS-GAME WE DON'T UNDERSTAND.

OUR PROBLEM NOW IS TO CROSS THAT MOAT--AND I THINK I'VE FOUND A WAY!

IT APPEARS WE HAVE VISITORS, WOLFGANG. ALERT THE RAMPARTS.

WE'LL KEEP THOSE TWO INTRUDERS FROM REACHING THE BRAIN--NO MATTER WHAT TRICKS THEY MAY TRY!

THAT'S IT, BEN! NOW SWING ME AROUND--LIKE A LARIAT.

HOPE YA KNOW WHAT YER DOIN', PAL--

--'CAUSE HERE GOES NUTHIN'!

FIRE, YOU FOOLS!

FIRE!

SKREE

SKREE

SKREE

YA GET THE FEELIN' WE AINT **WELCOME** AROUND HERE, STRETCH?

THOSE GUYS AINT EXACTLY ROLLIN' OUT NO **RED CARPET.**

STOP TALKING AND **HURRY,** BEN!

SPLAK

SPLAK

SPLAK

IT FEELS LIKE YOU'RE BREAKING MY **BACK!**

SORRY, STRETCH. **I** USETA HAVE A BAD BACK WHEN WE WUZ IN THE **ARMY**-- DIDN'T **TELL** ANYBODY ABOUT IT, 'CAUSE THEY'D HAVE SENT ME **HOME.**

ONCE A WEEK I'D PAY THIS GUY TA **WALK** ON IT FER ME. GOT THE CRINKS OUT REAL **GOOD.**

BLNT

THE **DOOR,** BEN! **THE DOOR!**

SORRY, REED. GUESS I GOT CARRIED AWAY **REMEMBERIN'!**

THOSE WERE SURE THE **GOOD OLD DAYS!**

WHA-

CHOOM!

CAREFUL, BEN. THERE'S SOMETHING VERY **WRONG** HERE.

THOSE MEDIEVAL KNIGHTS HAVE **RAY GUNS** OF SOME KIND!

BIG DEAL. I'M SHAKIN'.

THE ORANGE ONE **ADVANCES,** SIRE. WHAT SHALL WE **DO?**

FIRE YOUR **WEAPON,** FOOL. NO MAN ALIVE CAN **WITHSTAND** ITS EMERALD **BLAST!**

YA HEAR *THAT,* REED? LOOKS LIKE THEY NEVER HEARD'A *THE THING.*

THAT'S *ME,* BOYS. THEY CALL ME THE *THING* 'CAUSE I'M SO BLUE-EYED AN' *HANDSOME.*

I'M ALSO KINDA *STRONG.*

SEE?

SPLAK!

WHUMP!

WE *SEE,* UGLY ONE. YET EVEN ONE STRONG AS *YOU* MAY BE FELLED --IF THE BLOW USED IS *POWERFUL* ENOUGH!

:UNNNHH!=

BEN!

OUT OF MY *WAY!* IF YOU'VE *HARMED* HIM, I'LL--

YOU'LL DO *WHAT,* RICHARDS?

CALL THEM NASTY *NAMES?* THIS IS THE *BIG* TIME, EGGHEAD.

SWOOTCH!

YOU'VE GOTTA BE READY TO PLAY THE GAME *SERIOUS*-- GOT ME?

OR DON'T YOU *REMEMBER* YOUR OLD *EX*-TEAM-MATE, JOHNNY STORM...*THE HUMAN TORCH!*

SWOOTCH!

WILDMAN TOLD US WE'D FIND YOU TWO TRYING TO BEAT US TO THE BRAIN AND HIS SECRET SUPER WEAPON.

THEY'RE OURS, RICHARDS. MOVE OUT--OR DIE!

MEDUSA! JOHNNY! DON'T YOU SEE YOU'VE BEEN BRAINWASHED?

THOSE BIKERS WHO KIDNAPPED YOU* MUST HAVE USED SOME SORT OF HYPNOTISM ON YOU... YOU'RE NOT YOURSELVES!

WRONG, DAD.

*LAST ISH. --ROY.

WE'RE OURSELVES FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME.

YOU MAY THINK WE'RE REBELS WITHOUT A CAUSE, OLD MAN--BUT WE'VE GOT SOMETHING TO FIGHT FOR THAT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYTHING:

OURSELVES: NUMBER ONE.

YOU CAN'T MEAN THAT.

DONTCHA SEE, STRETCH?

HIM AN' MEDUSA ARE WORKIN' FOR THE OTHER SIDE--THEM BIKE-RIDIN' YOUTHIES!

LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE RIGHT, BEN.

FOOM!

WE'VE GOT NO CHOICE. WE HAVE TO STOP THEM--BEFORE THEY KILL US!

THAT'S WHAT I WANTED TA HEAR!

NUTHIN' PERSONAL, TORCHIE--BUT YA KNOW HOW I LIKE A GOOD FIGHT.

HANG ON, TROOPS, IT'S CLOBBERIN'-TIME!

FORGET SOMETHING, BEN GRIMM?

YEAH, RED...I FORGOT TODAY WUZ THE DAY I SHOULD'A STAYED IN BED.

YOU AN' THAT HAIR--SHEESH!

THAT'S IT, EGGHEAD-- TRY AN' *ESCAPE!*

IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF *TIME* BEFORE ONE OF MY HEAT-BLASTS CATCHES YOU SQUARE AND *FAIR!*

IF YOU WEREN'T UNDER THE *MENTAL INFLUENCE* OF THE SO-CALLED *YOUTHIES*, BROTHER-IN-LAW, YOU *MIGHT* RECALL--

BURT!

--THAT I'M NOT CALLED *MR. FANTASTIC* FOR NO REASON AT *ALL!*

SPLAK!

TRICKS! THAT'S ALL YOU OLD FOGIES ARE *GOOD* FOR!

WHY DON'T YOU *FIGHT?* OR ARE YOU *CHICKEN?*

CHICKEN!

THEM'S *FIGHTIN' WORDS*, TORCHIE!

NOW--IF I COULD JUST GET SOME *GROUND* UNDER ME SO'S I COULD *FIGHT--!*

EEEYOOWW

MEANWHILE, IN A TOWER HIGH OVER THE COURTYARD BATTLEFIELD, AN ELDERLY FIGURE WATCHES IN GROWING DISMAY...

NO, *NO, NO!*

THIS ISN'T HOW IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE *AT ALL!*

YOU'VE FOULED UP *EVERYTHING!*

I ASKED YOU TO MAKE ME *TOP DOG* IN THIS CRUMMY WORLD--TO GIVE ME MY LIFE-LONG *DREAMLAND--*

--AND LOOK WHAT'S *HAPPENED!*

THIS IS ALL WRONG! *ALL WRONG!*

PERHAPS I HAVE **MISUNDERSTOOD** YOUR SECRET FANTASIES, SLUGGER JOHNSON.

HAVE YOU NOT ALWAYS PRIVATELY **ENVIED** MEN WHOSE MINDS WERE MORE **INTELLIGENT** THAN YOURS?

IS NOT THIS PRESENT **IDENTITY** I'VE GIVEN YOU--THAT OF **"THE BRAIN"**--SATISFACTORY TO YOUR **EGO-IMAGE?**

PLEASE EXPLAIN WHERE I HAVE **ERRED.**

THOUGH MY LIFE IS INCREDIBLY **LONGER** THAN YOUR OWN, AND THOUGH MY PERCEPTIONS ARE MORE **INCISIVE**--I AM, AFTER ALL, **FINITE.**

IS IT THIS **MILIEU,** PERHAPS,? ACCORDING TO MY INTERPETATION OF YOUR **DREAMS**--YOU HAVE ALWAYS SECRETLY **CRAVED** YOUR OWN CASTLE, IN THE STYLE OF THE **"LATE SHOW MOVIES"** YOU WATCHED AS A CHILD.

WAS **THIS** MY ERROR,?

CORRECT ME, SLUGGER JOHNSON... FOR I AM **THE SHAPER***--I WISH TO MAKE YOUR DREAM **LIVE!**

YEAH, YEAH--I **KNOW.** YOU HAVEN'T GOT AN IMAGINATION OF YOUR **OWN,** SO YOU'VE GOTTA USE THE DREAMS OF **OTHER** LIVING CREATURES!

BUT CAN'T YOU AT LEAST GET THINGS **RIGHT?**

WHAT IN HECK ARE THE **FANTASTIC FOUR** DOIN' AROUND HERE?

THE **FANTASTIC FOUR,?**

*FIRST SEEN IN **HULK** #155, AND IN **FF** #136.--RT.

YEAH, YEAH... THE *F.F.!* THEY'RE THE ONES WHO GOT ME *INTO* THIS MESS.

THEY'RE A BUNCH OF-- ER--*MERCENARIES* WHO GO AROUND BEATIN' UP INNOCENT *ENTREPRENEURS*--

--LIKE THEY BEAT UP MY *BOSS,* *GREGORY GIDEON.* HE WANTED TA USE SOME OF THEIR *GENETIC ENERGY* TO SAVE HIM AND HIS SON FROM *RADIATION POISONING.*

THEY WIPED HIM OUT--AN' WIPED OUT THE *REST* OF US, TOO.!*

THEY'RE-- ER--THE *BAD GUYS,* SHAPER.

*SOMEWHAT *DIFFERENTLY* TOLD IN FF#135. --ROY.

BY THE TIME THEY WERE THROUGH, GIDEON WAS *DEAD,* AND MOST OF HIS HENCHMEN--I MEAN, *ASSISTANTS,* HAD FLED.

I'D *HAD* IT MYSELF. I WAS JUST ABOUT READY TO CALL IT ALL *QUITS* WHEN *YOU* SHOWED UP.

SEEMS DURING THAT LAST BATTLE I GOT BLASTED FULL'A *ENERGY*--

"AND SOMEHOW, THAT ENERGY **ATTRACTED** YOU FROM ACROSS ALL THOSE **LIGHT-YEARS.** YOU DECIDED YOU'D USE **MY** DREAMS TO RE-SHAPE PART OF THE **EARTH**--

"...AND SO YOU SENT OUT ALL THE ENERGY IN MY BODY, SENT IT OUT ACROSS **LONG ISLAND,** WHERE IT HIT BUILDINGS AND HIGHWAYS, AND HOSPITALS, AND **SUPERMARKETS**...

"...EVEN **PEOPLE!** AND THOSE RAYS CHANGED **EVERYTHING,** SHOVING FOLKS BACK INTO THE **PAST,** TO THE **1950's!**

"IT WUZ **TERRIFIC!** JUST WHAT I'D ALWAYS **DREAMED!**

"THEN THINGS STARTED GOING BAD. THOSE **ENERGY-RINGS** OF YOURS CAUGHT THE F.F. AS THEY WUZ HEADING BACK TO **MANHATTAN.**

"AS IF THAT WASN'T WRONG **ENOUGH...**

"...THEY GET BROKEN INTO **PAIRS,** THE YOUNG PUNK JOHNNY STORM AND THAT WOMAN CALLED **MEDUSA** PICKED UP BY **THE WILD ONES,** A GROUP OF BIKERS WHO MANAGED TO GET THEM UNDER THEIR **CONTROL.**

"AND THE **OLDER** PAIR, REED RICHARDS AND BEN GRIMM, SNATCHED BY **THE PATRIOTS,** WERE **ALSO** BRAINWASHED BY A SET OF TRICKED-UP **ISOLATION BOOTHS.**

"WITH THEM, THE CONDITIONING **WORE OFF--** I **GUESS** 'CAUSE THEY GOT MORE **YEARS** UNDER THEIR BELTS--

--BUT THAT DOESN'T REALLY **MATTER,** BECAUSE **BOTH** SETS ARE OUT TO CAPTURE **ME.**

THEY THINK **I'VE** GOT ALL THE BLASTED **ANSWERS!**

--JUST 'CAUSE **YOU** RE-SHAPED ME TA LOOK LIKE **EINSTEIN!**

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME **DO,** SLUGGER JOHNSON?

WE GOTTA BREAK OUT **THE WARHEAD,** SHAPER.

JUST LIKE IN THOSE MOVIES I USEDTA SEE IN THE **DRIVE-IN'S.**

OTHER-WISE WE AINT GOT A **CHANCE!**

VERY WELL, SLUGGER JOHNSON, THIS IS A STEP I DO NOT **RELISH** TAKING...

...BUT THIS IS **YOUR** WORLD, AND IF YOU CLAIM WE **MUST...**

...THEN, BY ETERNITY, WE **SHALL!**

AND, IN THE COURTYARD **BELOW**, WHERE THE BATTLE STILL **RAGES**...

WHADDA WE DO **NOW**, HIGH-POCKETS?

FIGHTIN' YER BEST FRIENDS AINT AS EASY AS I **THOUGHT**.

FOOM!

TRUE, BEN.! IT'S **ONE** MATTER WHEN THE FIGHT IS A **FRIENDLY** ONE.

BUT WHEN YOU MAY HAVE TO **HURT**--UNNHH!

*ANOTHER UNABASHED **PLUG** FOR OUR FABULOUS FLEDGLING **FAN-CLUB!**--R.T.

WELL, WE BETTER FIGGER OUT SUMTHIN' **QUICK**, BOSS-MAN.

THIS IS GETTIN' **MONOTO-NOUS!**

WAIT, ALL OF YOU!

LOOK AT THE GUARDS!

THEY'RE GLOWING WITH SOME KIND OF **ORANGE LIGHT!**

GOOD LORD! THEY'RE **CHANGING** --TURNING INTO SOME OF THE **BIKERS!**

AND THAT'S NOT **ALL!** THE CASTLE GROUNDS ARE **FADING OUT**--

--TURNING INTO A **PARKING LOT!**

NOT A **PARKING** LOT, MATCH-HEAD!

A DRIVE-IN MOVIE!

WHAT WAS IT *ALICE* WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE SAID? "CURIOUSER AND *CURIOUSER...*"

THERE MUST BE SOME *FORCE* AT WORK WE DON'T YET *UNDERSTAND*-- A FORCE CAPABLE OF TWISTING THE VERY *FABRIC* OF REALITY!

YA FIGGERED THAT *OUT*, DID YA?

WHILE YER *AT* IT, BIG-WORDS--MEBBE YA CAN TELL US WHAT *THAT* BOZO IS SUPPOSED TA BE!

LOOKS LIKE A CROSS BETWEEN *SPUTNIK* AN' *KING KONG!*

*WAIT*A SECOND... D'YA SEE WHAT *I* SEE?

AM I GOIN' CRAZY, OR *WHAT?*

IF YOU ARE, BEN-- THEN SO ARE *WE!*

THAT MONSTER'S ALIVE!

HISSSSSSSS

*FOR AN INSTANT IT **PAUSES** IN THE SWEET-SMELLING TWILIGHT. ITS GLOBED HEAD **SWIVELS**, "PEERING" AT THE PEOPLE RUNNING TERRIFIED FROM IT BELOW...*

*SUDDENLY, IT **FINDS** THE OBJECT OF ITS SEARCH...*

*...AND WITH A LUNGE, IT **ATTACKS!***

WHAT IN THE NAME OF *PATRIOTISM* IS THE *MEANING* OF THIS?

WE SENT THOSE TWO *OUTSIDERS* ON A MISSION TO CAPTURE *THE BRAIN*--AND IT SEEMS THEY'VE CONSPIRED TO *BETRAY* US!

POINT OF *ORDER*, SENATOR: CAN WE BE SURE THEY'VE *TEAMED* WITH THOSE OTHER TWO STRANGERS--THE FLAMING ONE, AND THE WOMAN CALLED *MEDUSA*?

SURE? OF *COURSE* WE'RE SURE, KONE!

LOOK AT THEM ON THE *VISI-SCREEN!* THE FOUR OF THEM --BATTLING *THE WARHEAD.*

SENATOR McHAMMER ...IS THAT THE *WARHEAD*?

THAT'S *IT!* THE *SECRET WEAPONS* DEVISED BY THE *BRAIN*--

--A WEAPON *WE'VE* GOT TO HAVE BEFORE THOSE BLASTED *YOUTHIES* GET THEIR HANDS ON IT!

IF YOU'RE TRUE PATRIOTS, YOU'LL FOLLOW ME TO THE *EDSELS.*

WE HAVEN'T A MOMENT TO *LOSE,* IF WE'RE TO DEFEND THIS GREAT NATION OF OURS FROM THE CREEPING *YOUTHIE MENACE.*

YES! OR ELSE WE'LL BE *ENGULFED!*

OUR GLORIOUS COUNTRY-- CRUSHED UNDER THE HEEL OF YOUTHIE *OPPRESSION?*

NEVER!

WE'LL DIE IN OUR *SHELTER* FIRST!

OURS IS A FAR *GREATER* DESTINY.

OURS IS TO MAKE THE WORLD *FREE* FOR *THE NATION.*

DIDN'T *SEE* ME--LIKE I WAS AN *INVISIBLE MAN.*

ISN'T THAT *ALWAYS* HOW IT IS--WE BLACKS ARE FORGOTTEN, WHILE *THEY* GO OFF TO FIGHT THEIR WARS OF *GLORY?*

MAYBE THAT'S THE WAY IT WAS *YESTERDAY*...BUT TODAY, THINGS ARE GOING TO BE *DIFFERENT.*

TODAY... THINGS ARE GOING TO *CHANGE!*

A WISE AND GENTLE MAN ONCE SAID: "IF YOU'VE SEEN ONE SLUM, YOU'VE SEEN THEM ALL."

IN THAT CASE, YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN THIS SLUM. AND YOU KNOW IT FOR WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT HIDES...

MISERY. HUMAN MISERY. THE MISERY OF BEING ABANDONED...AND ALONE.

BROTHER AND SISTERS! LISTEN!

ARE WE GOING TO SIT IN OUR APATHY FOREVER? ARE WE GOING TO BUY THE STORY THE "PATRIOTS" TRY TO SELL US--THAT IF WE JUST WAIT, THINGS WILL WORK OUT IN THE END?

DO WE BELIEVE THAT, WHEN OUR CHILDREN GROW UP WITH RATS AND DISEASE--

--WHEN OUR FATHERS LEAVE OUR FAMILIES BECAUSE THEY'RE ASHAMED THEY CAN'T FIND WORK?

OR ARE WE GOING TO FIGHT?

NOT ON MCHAMMER'S TERMS--WITH GUNS AND FIRE, BUT WITH THE STRENGTH OF WILL WE KNOW HE CAN'T RESIST!

ARE WE GOING TO SAY, "WE'RE MEN"--

"WE'RE MEN, AND YOU'RE GOING TO ACCEPT THAT--BECAUSE WE WON'T SETTLE FOR ANYTHING LESS, FROM YOU--OR FROM THE WORLD!"

WELL? THE ANSWER'S YOURS, BROTHER! IS IT YES--OR NO?

YES!

THEN LET'S MOVE, BROTHERS!

DESTINY LIES THAT WAY!

ON THE CONTRARY: HERE LIES CHAOS!

FUMP!

LOOKS LIKE WE'RE IN THIS *TOGETHER*, FLATTOPS!

WHATEVER THIS BABY IS-- WE AINT GONNA STOP IT *ALONE!*

CALL IT A *REPRIEVE*, EGGHEAD.

SOON AS THIS *B.E.M.'S** FINISHED-- WE COME AFTER *YOU!*

FOOM!

WELL, STRETCH? WHADDA WE *WAITIN'* FOR?

LIKE TORCHIE SAID--RIGHT NOW WE'RE *PARTNERS* AGAIN.

SEEMS LIKE WE OUGHTA *DO* SUMTHIN' ABOUT IT-- *RIGHT?*

ABSOLUTELY, PARTNER!

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THAT CREATURE I DON'T QUITE *UNDER-STAND*, BUT THIS I *DO*--

IT'S DANGEROUS AND *DEADLY*--AND IT WANTS US *DESTROYED!*

AND FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN *THAT*-- *WE HAVE TO DESTROY IT!*

*BUG EYED MONSTER, FOOTNOTE FOLLOWER. --RASCALLY.

EASY FER *YOU* TA SAY, RUBBER-MAN!

IN CASE YA HADN'T *NOTICED*, THIS BABY'S *BIG!*

WHAK!

'COURSE, IN A MANNER'A *SPEAKIN'*, OL' BENJAMIN GRIMM'S A WHOLE LOT *BIGGER!*

CRUMP!

FOR SEVERAL LONG SECONDS, THE CREATURE KNOWN AS THE **WARHEAD** LIES STILL--GATHERING ENERGIES FROM **WITHIN** ITS MASSIVE FORM.

IT **IGNORES** THE RAY BLASTS OF THE J.D.'s ON THEIR FLYING **BIKES--**

--UNTIL, SUDDENLY, **IT FIRES A BLAST OF ITS OWN!**

SKRELLE

WHUMP

KEEP *FIRIN'*, WILD ONES!

BABY HERE AINT *GOD!*

HEY, *MOON!*

DON'T LOOK *NOW--*

--BUT HERE COMES THE **FUZZ!**

WITH A WAIL LIKE FIGHTERS FROM **ANOTHER** AIRBORNE WAR, THE EDSEL-RIDING PATRIOTS **ATTACK.**

AND UNDER THEIR ONSLAUGHT, THE WARHEAD STAGGERS-- **STUNNED!**

KRAKOOM

STAY **AWAY** FROM HIM, JOHNNY! I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO **HURT** YOU--

BUT FOR **BEN'S** SAKE, I **WILL!**

TAKE IT **EASY,** REED... I'M NOT GOING TO **HARM** HIM.

SOMETHING **HAPPENED** TO ME A MOMENT AGO. SUDDENLY... I REALIZED I DIDN'T NEED TO **FIGHT** YOU ANYMORE, THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING **ELSE** TO BATTLE...

GOOD **LORD,** JOHNNY-- DO YOU SEE WHAT'S **HAPPENING?**

...A THREAT BIGGER THAN **EITHER** OF US!

IT'S ALL **CLEAR** NOW!

MAYBE IT'S CLEAR TA **YOU,** STRETCH--

--BUT ME, I CAN'T FIGGER HOW THE **BIKERS** AN' THE **STRAIGHTS** GOT TOGETHER SO **QUICK!**

MUST BE SUMTHIN' IN THE **AIR.**

THE WAY **I** SEE IT, WE GOTTA **SURROUND** THAT "**WARHEAD**" JOKER, TORCHIE.

FLY ON **AHEAD** WHILE I HITCH ME A **RIDE!**

WHAT'S THE **GIG,** BIG UGLY?

I WANTCHA TA GET ME AS CLOSE TO THAT GIANT **BASKETBALL** AS YA CAN.

I GOT A **HUNCH** I WANNA **TRY OUT!**

YEEEOP!

WHERE'D YA LEARN TO **DRIVE** THIS THING--**ARTHUR MURRAY'S DANCE SCHOOL?**

THERE YA GO. MOVE THIS BIKE IN WHILE TORCHIE'S GOT HAND-SOME **CONFUSED**-- 'CAUSE RIGHT NOW--

--IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!

BROOM

CAN YA BEAT THAT?

TINKERTOY'S FALLIN' BACK INTA THE SCREEN!

THAT ISN'T ALL, BEN. THE SCREEN'S COLLAPSING WITH HIM.

LOOKS LIKE WE MAY NEVER KNOW WHERE THAT CREATURE CAME FROM--

BUT RIGHT NOW, THAT'S THE VERY LEAST OF OUR WORRIES!

TELL IT LIKE YOU SEE IT, DAD.

NOW THAT THAT WARHEAD CREEP'S DONE A FAST FADE--THINGS ARE BACK TA NORMAL.

WHICH MEANS FLAT-TOP HERE IS GONNA START PLAYIN' GESTAPO AGAIN... RIGHT, McHAMMER?

AFTER WE PULL YOUR FAT OUT OF THE FIRE, I CAN JUST SEE YOU OLDIES MAKIN' LIKE YOU DID ALL THE WORK--

IT WAS ONE OF YOUR SO-CALLED "OLDIES" WHO DESTROYED THAT MENACE, "WILDMAN"!

SURE--'CAUSE WE FLEW HIM THERE!

AND DON'T KID YOURSELF, POP...WE JUST TEAMED UP WITH YOU FRIZZ-HEADS BECAUSE WE NEEDED TO.

YOU THINK THAT MEANS ANYTHING PERMANENT ...YOU'RE WRONG.

RIGHT ON, BROTHER!

"RIGHT" --WHAT?

WE SAID, "RIGHT ON, BROTHER," AND WE *MEAN* WHAT WE *SAY!*

THINGS ARE GOING TO BE *DIFFERENT* FROM NOW ON. YOU *KNOW* IT.

YOU *TELL* HIM, MARTY!

WHAT IS THE *MEANING* OF ALL THIS? WHO *ARE* YOU PEOPLE?

WE'RE YOUR *CONSCIENCE*, MR. PATRIOT! WHILE YOU FOLKS WERE OFF FIGHTING THE BIG BAD *MENACE*--

--*WE* WERE GETTING OURSELVES TOGETHER, FINALLY UNDERSTANDING THAT IF WE *WANT* OUR CIVIL RIGHTS-- WE'D HAVE TO *DEMAND* THEM.

DIG?

DIG? WHAT SORT OF SLANG IS *THAT?*

IT'S THE SLANG OF THE *SIXTIES*, MISTER--AND THAT'S WHERE WE *ARE* NOW!

NO MORE SAFE AN' COZY 1950's FOR *YOU*, BROTHER. YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO COME OUT OF YOUR EISENHOWER *COCOON*--

YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO *GROW UP*, MISTER SUPERNATIONAL *PATRIOT.*

I SAID WE WERE YOUR *CONSCIENCE*... AND BABY, THAT'S WHAT WE ARE... WHAT WE'RE GOING TO *BE.*

FACE IT, BUSTER... YOU JUST CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN...

THEY'RE *GONE!* VANISHED... AS THOUGH THEY'D NEVER *EXISTED!*

STRANGE...BUT TOWARD THE *END*, IT WAS AS THOUGH WE WERE *RELIVING* HISTORY.

THE WAY *THE NATION* JOINED TO BATTLE A COMMON ENEMY--AND THE WARHEAD'S RESEMBLANCE TO THE RUSSIAN *SPUTNIK* OF THE LATE '50's. IS IT *POSSIBLE*--?

IS *WHAT* POSSIBLE, STRETCH?

COULD WE HAVE BEEN SHOWN THIS FOR A *REASON*...?

YES AND *NO*, EARTHLINGS.

THERE IS REASON IN *ALL* THINGS...

...THOUGH AT TIMES THE REASON IS *UNCLEAR.*

WHO IN THE NAME OF *AGON*--?

I AM CALLED **THE SHAPER**... AND IT IS MY GIFT AND MY CURSE TO MAKE DREAMS **LIVE.**

THE DREAMER I CHOSE WAS NOT **WORTHY** OF HAVING HIS FANTASIES **REALIZED**...AND I **APOLOGIZE** FOR MY ERROR.

IT WAS **HE** WHO THREATENED YOU IN THE GUISE OF **THE WARHEAD**--HE WHOM YOU SOUGHT AND KNEW AS THE **BRAIN.**

I HAVE PLACED HIM IN A WORLD WHERE HIS DREAMS OF PETTY VIOLENCE WILL HARM **NO ONE**...

...AND IN HIS STEAD, I HAVE TAKEN THE BOY YOU CALL **THOMAS.***

*GREGORY GIDEON'S **SON**, SEEN LAST ISH. --ROY.

THE BOY SHALL BE **CURED** OF HIS FATAL DISEASE--AND FOR A TIME, **HE** SHALL PROVIDE THE DREAMS WITH WHICH I MUST EXIST.

IT WILL BE A PLEASANT LIFE FOR **BOTH** OF US--UNTIL HE MUST **RETURN** TO REALITY.

EVEN AS **I** MUST NOW RETURN--TO THE **DREAM.**

WAITA MINNIT! WHAT ABOUT **US?**

LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE GOT AN **ANSWER,** BEN!

WE'RE **VANISHING**--JUST LIKE THOSE **OTHERS!** AND MAYBE IT'S AN UNFAIR **GUESS**--

--BUT I'D SAY WE'RE HEADED BACK TO WHAT WE WERE DOING **BEFORE** ALL THIS --FLYING BACK TO **MANHATTAN** IN--

THE FANTASTICAR!

WE'RE BACK, BEN...BACK TO THE **REAL WORLD!**

HURRAH. BACK TA RIOTS, AN POLLUTION AN' **WOMEN'S LIB.**

YA **KNOW** SUMTHIN', TORCHIE?

MAYBE WE SHOULDA **STAYED** IN THE FIFTIES.

I MEAN...THINGS WEREN'T ALL **THAT** BAD...

WUZ THEY? ...TORCHIE?

NOT ANOTHER **WORD,** BEN.

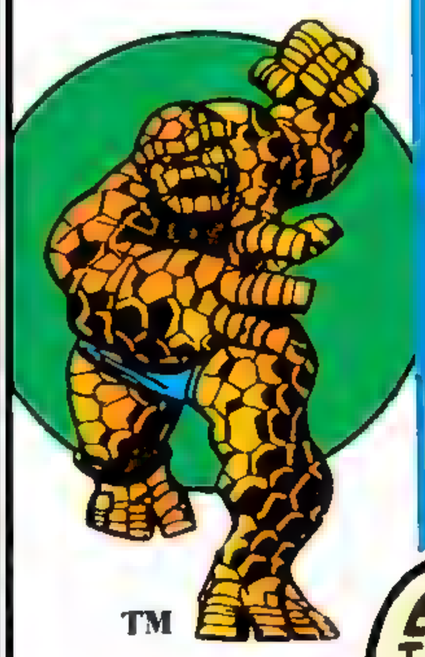
I THINK I'M GOING TO BE **SICK.**

NEXT ISSUE: **THE MIRACLE MAN!**

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP™
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
20¢ CC
138 SEPT 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®



™

BEN-- I DON'T GET IT!

WE'VE JUST CORNERED THE MIRACLE MAN--

--AND HE DOESN'T EVEN LOOK WORRIED!

YEAH? WELL, JUST SNEAK A PEAK BEHIND YA, TORCHIE--AN' YOU'LL FIND OUT WHY!

THIS WAY LIES... MADNESS!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

MADNESS IS... THE MIRACLE MAN!

FEATURING: THE FAR-OUT RETURN OF AN OLD FRIEND!

ORDINARILY, WE'D USE THIS SPACE TO FILL YOU IN ON OUR LAST ISSUE... BUT SINCE WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR FABULOUS FOURSOME AN HOUR AGO ISN'T HALF AS INTERESTING AS WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO THEM NOW... WHAT SAY WE SKIP THE AMENITIES?

LET'S SIMPLY SET THE PLACE (THE BAXTER BUILDING, OUR GROUP'S HOMEY HEADQUARTERS), AND THE TIME (IN BETWEEN YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW), AND PICK UP THE DETAILS AS WE MOVE ALONG... OKAY?

OKAY!

I GOTTA BE DREAMIN'!

OF ALL THE GUYS TA SHOW UP... YOU!

BEFORE WE GET TO THAT, LET'S GET THROUGH WITH THIS:

THIS ISSUE BROUGHT TO YOU BY: GERRY CONWAY SCRIPTER JOHN BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT, ARTISTS

WITH AN ASSIST BY: J. COSTANZA, letterer P. GOLDBERG, Colorist

AND MORAL SUPPORT BY: ROY THOMAS, EDITOR

OKAY, CONTINUE:

15242

WYATT WINGFOOT!
YOU WERE EXPECTING DOCTOR DOOM, MR. GRIMM?
DIDN'T YOU RECEIVE MY WIRE?
I SENT IT TWO DAYS AGO.
SO WHO GETS A CHANCE TA READ MAIL?
THE WAY THINGS'VE BEEN GOIN' THE PAST WEEK, YER LUCKY WE'RE HERE AT ALL.
WHOA! WATCH IT, BIG FELLA.
I KNOW YOU'RE GLAD TO SEE YOUR EX-ROOM-MATE, BUT COULDN'T YOU JUST SHAKE HANDS?
THAT'S MY BACK YOU'RE BREAKING!
WHAT BRINGS YOU TO MANHATTAN, WYATT?
COLLEGE OUT?
HEY, THAT'S RIGHT!
YER STILL BIG MAN ON CAMPUS, AIN'T YA?
--FOUR YEARS AGO, MR. GRIMM.
YOU AN' TORCHIE STARTED AT METRO U TOGETHER--
I'M GRADUATING THIS WEEK... TODAY, IN FACT.
CONGRATU-LATIONS, SON!
THAT'S SWELL, WYATT!
I WAS HOPING YOU'D BE MY GUESTS AT THE CEREMONY, AND THEN AFTERWARDS--
--I'M RETURNING TO MY PEOPLE AT OUR RESERVATION-- AND I'D LIKE THE FOUR OF YOU TO COME WITH ME.
ANYTHING WRONG, WYATT?
NOTHING I CAN PINPOINT, MR. RICHARDS,
IT'S JUST A FEELING I HAVE... THAT MY PEOPLE ARE IN TROUBLE.
WILL YOU COME?
I'M SURE THE OTHERS WILL, WYATT... BUT I'M AFRAID I CAN'T.
I WANT TO BE HERE... IN CASE MY WIFE COMES BACK.
AS YOU KNOW, SUE AND I ARE SEPARATED...
REED, YOU MUST NOT PUNISH YOURSELF THIS WAY.
COME WITH US... GET YOUR THOUGHTS OFF SUE AND LITTLE FRANKLIN...
SORRY, MEDUSA-- I'VE MADE UP MY MIND.
THE THREE OF YOU GO... BUT I'M STAYING. THAT'S FINAL.

AND SO, A SHORT TIME LATER, IN THE ADJOINING ROOMS OF JOHNNY STORM AND THE BLUE-EYED THING...

REED'S REALLY DUMPING ON HIMSELF SINCE SUE LEFT, BEN.

THINK HE'LL EVER SNAP OUT OF IT?

WHADDA YOU THINK?

GUESS I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN.

HEY, TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT-- WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS SUIT?

LITTLE OLD, HUH?

YER ASKIN' ME? I'M THE GUY WHO DRESSES LIKE MICKEY SPILLANE.

SHEESH!

NOW DON'T BOTHER ME.

I'M CALLIN' ALICIA.

SHE MUST BE WORRIED SICK-- NOT HAVING HEARD FROM YOU IN ALMOST A WEEK.

YOU SHOULD TAKE BETTER CARE OF THAT LADY, BENJY. SHE'S--

HUH?

HOLY COW! IT JUST HIT ME, AFTER SEEING THOSE HOOD-TYPES FROM THE 1950'S *--

I LOOK LIKE A REFUGEE FROM AN OLD ELVIS FLICK!

*CREATED BY THE SHAPER LAST ISH. --RT.

I'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT MY HAIR--

PRONTO!

YOU DO THAT, MATCH-HEAD. IT'S REAL IMPORTANT!

DUMB KID... YA THINK A GUY LIKE BOGEY CARED HOW HE COMBED HIS HAIR? YA THINK LLOYD NOLAN WATCHED WHICH SIDE HE PARTED?

YEAH... IT'S REAL IMPORTANT. ASK THE GUYS I FLEW WITH DURIN' THE BIG ONE...

THEY'LL TELL YA... HAIR'S THE FIRST THING THEY THOUGHT ABOUT, JUST BEFORE THEY CLIMBED ABOARD THAT OLD B-29...

YOU BET.

IT'S A REAL EARTH-SHAKER.

GUESS ALICIA WUZN'T HOME.

...MUST BE OUT... SHOPPIN', MAYBE.

YEAH. SHOPPIN'.

BUT, IF THE THING COULD DO WHAT **WE** CAN DO! LOOK IN AT ALICIA'S JUST FIVE **MINUTES** AGO...

...HE WOULD HAVE SEEN A YOUNG BLIND GIRL **LEAVING** HER DARKENED STUDIO, HER FACE ETCHED WITH **CONCERN**...

HE WOULD HAVE **KNOWN** SHE'D TRIED TO CALL HIM MANY TIMES IN THE PAST FEW HOURS--TO NO **AVAIL.**

AND HE WOULD HAVE **SENSED**--

--AS **WE** SENSE, THAT SHE'S LEAVING THIS STUDIO FOR WHAT MAY BE THE **LAST TIME**--AND THAT SHE MAY NEVER **RETURN.**

AND FINALLY, HE WOULD HAVE HEARD THE PHONE **RING**--

--JUST FIVE MINUTES **TOO LATE.**

YA SURE YA WON'T **COME,** STRETCH?

CERTAIN OF IT, THING.

THE FOUR OF YOU WILL DO **FINE** WITHOUT ME.

TAKE **CARE** OF YOURSELF, MR. RICHARDS... AND **GOOD LUCK.**

THANKS, WYATT... GOOD LUCK TO YOU.

VVROOOOMM

FOR SEVERAL SECONDS AFTER HE HAS LOST **SIGHT** OF THE POGO PLANE'S ROCKETING FORM, REED RICHARDS REMAINS **STARING** AT THE COBALT-BLUE SKY, HIS THOUGHTS TOO **PRIVATE** FOR US TO SHARE.

AND WHEN HE AT LAST **LOOKS AWAY,** PERHAPS A **SIGH** ESCAPES HIS LIPS...

...AND PERHAPS HE WISHES, FOR JUST AN INSTANT, THAT HE COULD **SHIRK** THE RESPONSIBILITY WHICH WEIGHS SO **HEAVILY** UPON HIM...

IF SO, THE THOUGHT LASTS **ONLY** AN INSTANT, THEN DIES...LIKE REED RICHARD'S **MEMORY** OF HAPPIER DAYS...

THE WAY *THIS* BABY MOVES, WE'LL BE AT METRO U. IN HALF AN *HOUR*.

GOTTA HAND IT TA STRETCHO-- HE KNOWS HOW TA *BUILD* 'EM.

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF, WYATT WINGFOOT.

I FEEL AS THOUGH I *KNOW* YOU, BUT--

--WE'RE STILL *STRANGERS*.

I KNOW THE *FEELING*, MEDUSA.

THAT'S HOW I FELT ABOUT *JOHNNY* THE FIRST DAY I MET HIM.

WELL... WHAT IS THERE TO *TELL*? I'M AN *INDIAN*, OF THE *KEEWAZI* TRIBE.

IT WAS MY *PRIVILEGE* TO JOIN YOUR FRIENDS IN THEIR *ADVENTURES* FOR A TIME--

--BUT FOR THE PAST FEW *YEARS*, I HAVE BEEN AT *COLLEGE*, WHERE JOHNNY AND I ONCE--

HEY! SPEAKIN' OF *FLAME-BRAIN*--

WHERE *IS* HE ANYWAY?

BACK *HERE*, OLD BUDDY. I WAS CHECKING OUT OUR *STORAGE TANK*-- MAKING SURE WE'LL HAVE ENOUGH *FUEL* TO REACH WYATT'S *RESERVATION*.

JOHNNY! YOUR *HAIR*--

WHAT *HAPPENED* TO IT?

WELL--I, UH, *FIXED* IT.

I THOUGHT IT'D LOOK BETTER IF I KEPT IT A LITTLE *LOOSE*, AN'-- WELL--

DON'T GET *EXCITED*, TORCHIE--YA LOOK JUST *BEEEUUUUTIFUL*.

YER A REGULAR *MICK JAGGER* NOW, KID.

YER JUS' *BEEEUUU-TIFUL*!

*AND AS OUR FRIENDS **LAUGH** AT JOHNNY'S DISCOMFORT, WE'LL SWITCH TO **ANOTHER** SCENE--*

*--A SCENE OF A MUCH MORE **SOBER** NATURE, IN THE MOUNTAINS SURROUNDING THE LAND RESERVED FOR THE **KEEWAZI** TRIBE, WHERE WE FIND A RUNNING **FIGURE**--A MAN RACING IN **FEAR** FROM SOME UNSEEN **MENACE**--*

*--WHO STUMBLES AND **FALLS** ON AN OUTJUTTING **ROCK**--*

--IS SUDDENLY BLANKETED BY A LOOMING SHADOW--

--AND SCREAMS!

YAAAAAHH

YAAAAAAAAHH

THE CRY-- IT COMES FROM THE DARK HILLS!

MY GRAND-SON WAS GOING THERE TO SEARCH FOR HIS DOG!

WE MUST HURRY TO HIM--

HE MAY BE IN DANGER-- A ROCKSLIDE--!

YET, AS THE MEN OF THE VILLAGE GATHER, AND MOVE OFF TO FOLLOW THE SOUND OF THE FADING SCREAM, THEY EACH RECALL THE LEGENDS OF THEIR FATHERS--

THEY EACH REMEMBER THE STORIES OF STRANGE HAPPENINGS IN THESE "DARK HILLS"--AND THEY ARE EACH JUST A LITTLE AFRAID!

AND THEN, AS THOUGH TO CONFIRM THEIR BLACKEST FEARS--

SILENT FOX-- THE MOUNTAIN, IT SHAKES BENEATH OUR FEET!

THE GROUND HEAVES LIKE A THING ALIVE-- WHAT INSANITY IS THIS?

IT IS NOT MADNESS, BLACK DEER--

TRULY, THE LAND REBELS!

BY THE GODS OF OUR FATHERS-- BEHOLD!

LIKE A MIGHTY DINOSAUR RETURNING FROM THE DARKNESS OF THE PAST, THE MOUNTAIN BEFORE THE VILLAGERS SEEMS TO SHUDDER AND RISE...

SHARDS OF STONE AND EARTH RAIN FROM THE HULKING CLIFFS, THE VERY SHAPE OF THE MOUNTAIN SEEMS TO ALTER AS THE TRIBESMEN WATCH...

WHAT THEY SEE IS MAD-NESS, YET IT IS A MADNESS THEIR MINDS CANNOT DENY--IN TRUTH, THE MOUN-TAIN WALKS..

IN TRUTH, THE MOUNTAIN IS ALIVE!

THEY ARE BRAVE MEN, THE KEEWAZI. THEY ARE SONS OF WARRIORS--THE DESCENDANTS OF KINGS.

YET IN THE FACE OF THE UNKNOWN, OF A NIGHTMARE BEYOND THEIR WILDEST IMAGININGS, THEY HAVE ONLY ONE RECOURSE--

THEY RUN--FOR THEIR LIVES!

MEANWHILE, ON THE CAMPUS OF A FAMED UNIVERSITY IN NEW JERSEY...

SUMTHIN' TELLS ME I'VE BEEN PUTTIN' ON A LITTLE WEIGHT.

THIS SUIT'S KILLIN' ME!

QUIET, BEN. THAT'S WYATT GOING UP FOR HIS DIPLOMA NOW.

HAVE A LITTLE RESPECT, BIG UGLY.

EASY FER YOU TA SAY. YER CLOTHES FIT!

WYATT, IT'S BEEN AN HONOR HAVING YOU AT METRO U.

WE'RE GOING TO MISS YOU, SON.

THANK YOU, SIR.

THE HONOR'S BEEN MINE.

Y'KNOW, JOHNNY-- IF YOU'D HAD THE GUTS TO STICK IT OUT--

-- THAT COULD'VE BEEN YOU UP THERE.

YEAH, IT COULD HAVE BEEN YOU.

SOON, AT A RECEPTION IN HONOR OF THE HIGHEST-RANKING GRADUATES...

--PROUD OF YOU, WYATT.

NOW, JOHNNY--!

NO, SERIOUSLY. I'M REALLY--

JOHNNY! JOHNNY STORM!

IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, MY BOY!

COACH THORNE! SAY, THIS IS OLD HOME WEEK. LAST TIME I SAW YOU, YOU WERE TRYING TO GET WYATT TO JOIN THE FOOTBALL TEAM.

NEVER DID MANAGE IT, EITHER.

YOU KNOW, JOHNNY-- I'M GLAD YOU'RE HERE.

I'VE BEEN MEANING TO GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR BROTHER-IN-LAW, REED RICHARDS.

HE AND I WERE--

WYATT! BAD NEWS, LAD...

YOUR GRANDFATHER JUST PHONED THE DEAN'S OFFICE. THEY NEED YOU HOME... QUICKLY!

COACH? MRS. THORNE? WOULD YOU PLEASE EXCUSE US?

THERE SEEMS TO BE AN EMER-GENCY!

JOHNNY AND I HAVE TO LEAVE.

WHAT'S UP, WYATT? YOUR PEOPLE...?

I DON'T KNOW, JOHNNY... BUT IF SILENT FOX CALLS SOMETHING AN "EMERGENCY"...

THEN IT'S GOTTA BE PRETTY BAD.

THERE'S MEDUSA UP AHEAD--

--GETTIN' SHOWN AROUND BY ONE'A THE FRATERNITY JOKERS.

HEY, RED-- TIME TA GO.

TROUBLE, BEN?

COULD JUST BE, LITTLE LADY.

WE'LL FIND OUT IN ABOUT AN HOUR --WHEN WE REACH OKLAHOMA!

AND SO, APPROXIMATELY FIFTY-SEVEN MINUTES LATER...

THEY ARRIVE, SILENT FOX.

OF COURSE.

DID YOU DOUBT THEY WOULD?

SILENT FOX... WHAT'S HAPPENED? I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU SO GRIM...

WE HAVE REASON TO BE GRIM, SON OF MY SON.

A DEMON HAS RISEN FROM THE HILLS TO ADD TO OUR MISERY.

AND OURS IS NOT THE ONLY TRIBE SO AFFLICTED--

THESE OTHERS, FROM THE VILLAGES BEYOND THE DARK HILLS--THEY COME TO US SEEKING SHELTER, FOR THEIR OWN HOMES HAVE BEEN DESTROYED!

HOW, GRANDFATHER? WHAT'S BEHIND THIS AWFUL DEED?

WE HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING. ONLY THIS MAY I TELL YOU--

--THE VERY EARTH HAS RISEN AGAINST US, POWERED BY FORCES BEYOND OUR UNDER-STANDING.

THE GODS THEM-SELVES ATTACK US!

NOT SO, YOU OLD FOOL!

YOUR GODS HAVE NOT ATTACKED YOU--

I HAVE!

AH, I SEE THIS NEWS CONFUSES YOU. YOU WONDER WHY I, A TOTAL STRANGER, SHOULD TAKE SUCH AN INTEREST IN YOUR PETTY LIVES.

I AM NOT SUCH A STRANGER AS YOU THINK--

I AM THE MIRACLE MAN--

--AND MINE IS THE DESTINY TO RULE!

STILL YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND, ASK YOUR FRIENDS, THEN--

--THOSE ARROGANT IMBECILES WHO CALL THEMSELVES A PART OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.

THEY KNOW ME*, AND WELL SHOULD THEY QUAKE IN FEAR AT THE VERY MENTION OF MY AWESOME NAME!

*SO DO WE... IF WE REMEMBER FF#3! --WHEW!-- ROY.

FEAR? NOW THAT'S A LAUGH, EH, BEN?

WE SHOULD BE AFRAID OF HIM.

LOOKIT ME--I'M SHAKING ALREADY.

C'MON, PAL-- TELL US ANOTHER ONE.

YOU KNOW THIS MAN, BEN? AND YET--YOU AREN'T AFRAID OF HIM?

BUT IF HE'S RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL OF THIS DESTRUCTION--!

MAYBE YOU'D BETTER START EXPLAINING, MISTER.

MY FRIEND, I SHALL DO MUCH MORE THAN EXPLAIN.

I WILL REVEAL BUT A SMALL PORTION OF MY POWER--

--SO!

THE ROCK--IT'S FORMING INTO *HANDS*-- GRASPING ME, *HOLDING* ME--

CAN'T-- BREAK *FREE*--!

TAKE IT *EASY*, RED.

ME AN' TORCHIE KNOW HOW TA *HANDLE* THIS JERK--

A COUPLE'A *BELTS* AN' IT'S ALL OVER BUT THE *SWEEPIN' UP!*

WHUMP!

I WISH I HAD YOUR *CONFIDENCE*, BENJAMIN GRIMM--

BUT ALL THIS IS QUITE *BEYOND* ME!

MY HAIR--ISN'T *STRONG* ENOUGH--TO STOP THESE-- THESE *HANDS!*

LIKE I *SAID*, LADY:

DON'T *SWEAT* IT!

THAT JERK'S NUTHIN' BUT *HOT AIR!*

YOU TELL HER ABOUT THE *LAST* TIME WE MET HIM, BEN, WHILE I--

FLAME ON!

I'M AFRAID YOU DON'T *UNDERSTAND*, STORM... THERE HAVE BEEN CERTAIN *CHANGES* SINCE LAST WE FOUGHT!

NO DOUBT YOU THINK MY POWERS ARE *STILL* ONLY THE MASTERY OF *PERFECT ILLUSION*--

--THAT THE *CREATURE* YOU SEE FORMING OUT OF STONE AND EARTH IS ONLY A *DREAM*, A HYPNOTIC *EFFECT* CREATED BY MY *WILL!*

I *WARN* YOU, MY FRIENDS-- IT IS FAR, FAR *MORE!*

IT IS YOUR DOOM!

OUR *DOOM*, HUH? THAT'S *RICH.*

NEXT THING YA KNOW, YER'LL BE MAKIN' *THREATS*--

THEN WE'LL *REALLY* HAVE A LAUGH! *HAW!*

HUH?

HEY, WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

"THE BIG *IDEA*", YOU LOQUACIOUS *LUMMOX*, IS THAT *THIS* TIME MY POWERS ARE ALL TOO *REAL*!

THIS TIME I TRULY *AM*--THE *MIRACLE MAN*!

HOORAY, YA GOT YERSELF A BETTER BAG OF TRICKS THAN YA HAD *BEFORE*.

YER *STILL* NUTHIN' BUT A CHEAP *MAGICIAN*-- AN' I'M GONNA *PROVE* IT TA YA, ONCE--

--AND FER *ALL*!

KA-BOW!

WHAT THE--? THAT WAS MY BEST *SUNDAY PUNCH*!

NUTHIN' CAN STAND UP TA THAT! *NUTHIN'*!

IT JUST AIN'T POSS-IBLE!

LOOKS LIKE THINGS *HAVE* CHANGED, BEN!

HANG *TIGHT*, OLD BUDDY-- I'LL TRY A COUPLE OF *HEAT BLASTS* ON MOUNT RUSHMORE HERE--!

UH-OH... DON'T SEEM TO BE *WORKING*, BUDDY...!

NATURALLY *NOT*, MY DEAR "HUMAN *TORCH*."

MY EARTHEN CONSTRUCT IS *IMPERVIOUS* TO YOUR BLASTS -- FOR IN THE SAME INSTANT YOUR FLAME *DISINTEGRATES* HIM, *MY* POWER RECREATES HIM *ANEW!*

YOU CAN DO *NOTHING*... *NOTHING!*

WANNA *BET*, CURLY TOP?

NOW THAT YOU'VE GIVEN ME THE *GROUND RULES*--

--IT'S A WHOLE NEW *BALL GAME!*

YOU *FOOL!* YOUR FLAME HAS INTER-RUPTED MY *ENERGY FLOW*--

WITHOUT THE CONSTANT *CURRENT*, MY CREATION WILL--

--CRUMBLE!

RUMMMBLE

YOU'LL *PAY* FOR THAT, STORM!

I PROMISE -- YOU'LL PAY MOST *DEARLY!*

FRIENDLY, AIN'T HE?

QUIET, BEN--

--I DON'T THINK WE CAN TAKE THE MIRACLE MAN AS LIGHTLY AS WE'D *LIKE* TO -- NOT *ANYMORE*.

WHAT-EVER'S *HAPPENED* TO HIM -- HE ISN'T THE SAME MAN WE BEAT ALL THOSE *YEARS* AGO!

MAYBE YOU'D BETTER *EXPLAIN*, JOHNNY!

SORRY, MEDUSA... I KEEP FORGETTING THAT YOU'RE *NEW* TO THE *FF*.

YOU WEREN'T PART OF THE *GROUP* BACK WHEN WE STARTED OUT, WHEN WE FIRST RAN *INTO* MR. MUSTACHE -- AT A *NIGHT-CLUB* IN THE WEST FIFTIES...

"...WHERE HE WAS BILLING HIMSELF AS **THE MIRACLE MAN,** THE GREATEST **MAGICIAN** IN ALL THE WORLD. IT WAS THE **USUAL** MYSTIC NONSENSE, WITH LEVITATING GIRLS, DISAPPEARING HOOPS, **SWORDS-IN-CABINETS...**

"THERE WAS ONLY **ONE** THING OUT OF THE ORDINARY...

"...**WE** WERE IN THE AUDIENCE, AND MAYBE IT WAS **OUR** PRESENCE THAT ACTED AS A CATALYST FOR WHAT LATER **HAPPENED...**

I'VE SEEN BETTER ACTS ON THE **AMATEUR HOUR.**

WHAT SAY WE CATCH A **MOVIE,** HUH?

OH, DON'T BE **SILLY,** BEN.

YOU ENJOY IT AS MUCH AS **WE** DO.

HOW DOES HE **DO** THAT STUFF, ANYHOW?

"HE WAS A **HYPNOTIST,** PERHAPS THE **GREATEST** HYPNOTIST IN HISTORY-- HIS GLANCE **ALONE** COULD MESMERIZE AN ENTIRE **CROWD!**

MAY I HAVE A **VOLUNTEER** FROM THE AUDIENCE?

PERHAPS THE FAMOUS **MR. GRIMM** WOULD COMPLY?

SURE. WHADDA I GOT TO **LOSE?**

IT'S ALL JUST A LOTTA **BUNK,** RIGHT?

INDEED.

IF THAT'S **SO,** MR. GRIMM-- WHAT DO YOU SAY TO--

--THIS?

HUH? A LION!

SOMEBODY GET THIS CAT **OFFA** ME!

BUT YOU'RE **MISTAKEN,** MR. GRIMM! IT'S NOT A LION AT ALL--**IS IT?**

:YEEEOW!:

SOME SORTA **MONSTER--!**

WHUMP!

"BUT IT **WASN'T** A MONSTER-- IT WAS AN **ILLUSION--**

"JUST LIKE THE MENACES WHICH ATTACKED US **LATER,** AFTER THE MIRACLE MAN HAD GONE **BERSERK** AND TRIED TO **CASH IN** ON HIS POWERS--!

"IT WAS ALL AN **ILLUSION,** THOUGH WHEN WE FOUGHT HIM IN A MOONLIT **FIELD,** WE DIDN'T **REALIZE** THAT--

"WE THOUGHT THE MONSTER HE SENT AGAINST US WAS **REAL**, AND WHEN HE **STRUCK OUT**--

KRUMP!

"--IT EVEN **FELT** LIKE A MONSTER'S WALLOP SHOULD! WE WOULD HAVE BEEN **KILLED** IF THINGS HAD KEPT UP THAT WAY-- WE WERE BEING TOSSED AROUND LIKE **TINKERTOYS**--!

"I MANAGED TO SLIP BACK, TO GET SOME **RANGE** ON THAT WALKING SKYSCRAPER. I'M NOT SURE WHAT I HOPED TO **DO**--

"-- BUT SIMPLY BECAUSE I COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING **ELSE**, I LET LOOSE WITH A **NOVA HEAT BLAST!** THAT'S WHAT **SAVED** US, I THINK--

"-- BECAUSE WHEN THAT HEAT BALL **HIT**, WE LEARNED SOMETHING WE HADN'T KNOWN BEFORE: THE MONSTER WAS ONLY A **MOVIE PROP** OF PAPER MACHE AND **PLY WOOD**, ANIMATED IN OUR MINDS BY THE MIRACLE MAN'S **HYPNOTISM**.

FOOM!!

"THE **NOVA FLASH** DID SOMETHING ELSE-- IT **BLINDED** MIRACLE MAN, CUTTING OFF HIS HYPNOTIC POWERS, WHICH LET US **CAPTURE** HIM AT LAST!"

JUST **SO**, STORM. IF YOU'LL ALLOW **ME** TO CONTINUE THE TALE, I CAN TELL YOU WHAT HAPPENED **AFTER** YOU TURNED ME OVER TO THE FEDERAL POLICE. I FOUND MYSELF **SENTENCED** TO A MIDWESTERN PENITENTIARY...

GRADUALLY MY EYESIGHT **RETURNED**...BUT MY POWER TO CONTROL MEN'S WILLS **DID NOT.**

I TURNED TO **OTHER** PURSUITS, THEN...

"FOR YEARS I'D BEEN FASCINATED BY THE CONCEPT OF **MIND-OVER-MATTER**, AND DURING MY DAYS IN PRISON I HAD AMPLE TIME TO **STUDY** THE MYRIAD BOOKS WRITTEN ON THAT HOARY SUBJECT...

"FINALLY, I LEARNED WHAT I NEEDED DESPERATELY TO **KNOW**...

"... AND WHEN I WAS **RELEASED** FROM THAT FOUL LITTLE PENITENTIARY, MY PLANS WERE **ALREADY** MADE...

WHAT'RE YOU GOING TO **DO** WITH YOURSELF, "PROFESSOR"?

NOW THAT YOU'RE **FREE**?

I'VE DECIDED TO DO SOME **TRAVELING**.

"SEE **AMERICA**"... THAT SORT OF THING.

GLAD TO **HEAR** IT. GOOD **LUCK** TO YOU, "PROF."

"YES, I WOULD BE TRAVELING... BUT MY MOVEMENTS WOULD NOT BE WITHOUT A **DESTINATION**.

"IN MY READING, I'D LEARNED OF A CERTAIN **INDIAN TRIBE**...

"...A TRIBE CALLED THE **CHEEMUZWA**, THE 'SILENT ONES', LOCATED IN THE CAVES OF THE MOUNTAINS YOU CALL THE **DARK HILLS**...

"...A TRIBE WHICH THE LEGENDS HINTED WAS **THREE THOUSAND YEARS OLD**, NOW CONSISTING ONLY OF A **HANDFUL** OF BRAVES AND ELDERS, MEN WHO WERE PURPORTED TO HAVE LIVED **CENTURIES**...

"...AND ALSO TO POSSESS THE **SECRET** OF TOTAL **MENTAL CONTROL**!

"I FOUND MY WAY TO THE PROPER **CAVE**, A DANK PIT IN THE FACE OF A MOUNTAIN WHICH HAD BEEN OLD WHEN ADAM FIRST SAW **EVE**...

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT I **EXPECTED**, BUT AT FIRST--

"-- I SAW ONLY A VAST, OPEN CAVE-- WHICH WAS PAINFULLY, FRUSTRATINGLY **EMPTY**.

"AND **THEN**--

WELCOME, MAN OF THE WHITE RACE.

I AM CALLED LIGHT HORSE--

--AND IT IS TO ME THAT YOU MUST EXPLAIN YOUR PRESENCE.

"THERE WERE SEVEN OF THEM, DRESSED IN CEREMONIAL GARB. SOMETHING ODD ABOUT THE LIGHT MADE THEM SEEM TRANSPARENT--AND UNLESS I WAS GOING INSANE--

YOU'RE FLOATING! FLOATING--AS THOUGH THE GROUND WASN'T EVEN THERE!

IT ISN'T POSSIBLE--

I MUST BE MAD!

YOU MOCK YOURSELF, WHITE MAN. SURELY THIS IS WHAT YOU CAME TO LEARN--

I'D BE A FOOL TO DENY IT.

WILL YOU TEACH ME, LIGHT HORSE?

--THE MYSTIC REASON FOR OUR ABILITIES, WHICH ARE SO NATURAL TO US--YET SO UNCOMMON TO YOU.

OUR TRIBE HAS NEVER DEALT WITH THE WHITE MAN--

--IT WOULD BE INTERESTING TO LEARN WHAT YOU HAVE TO TELL US--AND ONLY FAIR TO REVEAL OUR SECRETS IN TURN TO YOU!

"AND LIKE THAT, I WAS IN...

"LIGHT HORSE AND HIS TRIBE WERE IGNORANT OF THE DEALINGS INDIANS HAD HAD WITH THE WHITE MAN--THEY WERE SUCKERS FOR EVERY LIE I TOLD THEM--AND IN RETURN, THEY TAUGHT ME, LITTLE THINGS AT FIRST--

"--LIFTING SMALL PEBBLES--

"--AND EVENTUALLY, LARGER THINGS--SUCH AS BOULDERS, TREES, EVEN MEN.

"THE LEARNING DIDN'T STOP WITH THAT, THOUGH--

"THERE WAS MORE, MUCH MORE THAT I LEARNED IN THE WEEKS I SPENT WITH THE CHEEMUZWA. TRULY, I BECAME 'THE MIRACLE MAN'!

YOU HAVE COME FAR, WHITE MAN. YOU HAVE MASTERED DISCIPLINES UNKNOWN TO THE ELDERS OF YOUR RACE.

AND YET.., WE SENSE YOU HAVE NOT BEEN TRUTHFUL WITH US... AND THIS SADDENS US, MY SON.

I WAS WONDERING WHEN YOU'D WAKE UP, LIGHT HORSE.

A PITY FOR YOU IT WASN'T SOONER--

--BECAUSE NOW IT'S JUST TOO LATE!

RRRRUMMMBLE

"IT HAPPENED TOO QUICKLY FOR THEM TO STOP ME. BEFORE ANY OF THE TRIBE OF WISE MEN COULD REACT, THEIR WORLD HAD ENDED--

CRASH

"--AND MINE HAD JUST BEGUN!"

THOUGH MY POWERS WERE ALREADY BEYOND MY WILDEST IMAGININGS, I FELT I NEEDED TIME TO HONE THEM, TO SHAPE THEM TO THE WEAPON I NEEDED-- FOR REVENGE!

I TOOK THAT TIME BY ATTACKING YOUR VILLAGES--

--USING THEM AS TESTING GROUNDS FOR MY NEWBORN ABILITIES!

BUT NOW, THE TESTING IS OVER.

NOW--'TIS TIME FOR DESTINY!

SHEESH, HAS HE GONE CRACKERS THESE PAST COUPLE'A YEARS!

YA THINK ANY'A THAT'S TRUE, TORCHIE?

I'M NOT SURE, BEN.

IT COULD ALL BE JUST AN ILLUSION, BUT--

"BUT--?" YOU NEED FURTHER PROOF?

LOOK THEN, FOOLS--AND RUE THE DAY YOU SAW ME ANEW, FOR IN TRUTH--

--IT HAS BEEN THE LAST DAY OF YOUR ALL-TOO-PITIABLE LIVES!

KKKRAAKK-

AND WITH A GROAN LIKE THAT OF A WAKING BEHEMOTH, THE EARTH BELOW OUR HEROES FEET SHUDDERS, QUAKES-- AND OPENS LIKE A YAWNING MAW!

FOR SEVERAL SECONDS FRIGHTENED CRIES CAN BE HEARD ECHOING THROUGH THE SHALLOW VALLEY-- AND THEN THE SCREAMS FADE AS THE VILLAGERS AND TEAMMATES ALIKE FALL BEYOND OUR HEARING--

--AND THE EARTH, AS THOUGH MIMICKING A FAMED BIBLICAL SEA, CLOSES UP ONCE MORE-- BRINGING A CLOUD OF DUST-- AND SILENCE!

I WARNED THEM... BUT THEY WOULD NOT LISTEN.

MINE IS THE POWER TO MAKE MIRACLES--

--AND MINE IS THE DESTINY TO RULE--

--TILL THE VERY END OF TIME!

NEXT ISSUE: TARGET: TOMORROW

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ CC | 139 OCT 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR

TARGET: TOMORROW!

DULL-WITTED MONSTROSITY! YOU'RE NO MATCH FOR THE NEW MIRACLE MAN!

WE'LL-- :UNNNHH!: SEE ABOUT THAT, PAL--

--'CAUSE WHEN I GET UP-- IT'S GLOBBERIN' TIME!

Stan Lee Presents: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

GERRY CONWAY, SCRIPTER * JOHN BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT, ARTISTS * J. COSTANZA, letterer STAN G., colorist * ROY THOMAS, EDITOR * WYATT WINGFOOT GEOGRAPHICAL ADVISOR

Target: TOMORROW!

BEN GRIMM... JOHNNY... WHAT'S *HAPPENED* TO US?

A MOMENT AGO WE FACED THE VILLAIN YOU CALLED THE *MIRACLE MAN*, BUT NOW--

--WE'RE *FALLING*-- *PLUNGING* INTO *ETERNITY!*

YA *KNOW* SUMTHIN', RED?

YA GOT A REAL FANCY WAY OF *PUTTIN'* THINGS... YER A REGULAR BAG OF *GIGGLES.*

THIS PIT SEEMS TO BE *BOTTOMLESS*, MR. GRIMM!

AS THOUGH THE *EARTH ITSELF* HAD SWALLOWED US ALL--*FOREVER!*

AN' TA THINK THIS STARTED AS A REAL NICE *DAY!* SHEESH!

YOU TOO, WINGFOOT, YER A REGULAR PAIR 'A *CHEER-LEADERS!*

16102

WELL, IT'S A CINCH THINGS AIN'T GETTIN' BETTER BY *THEMSELVES.*

GUESS IT'S UP TA *ME* TA GET THINGS *MOVIN'*--

--AS *USUAL!*

FIRST, I'LL GRAB A HUNK OF THIS *PIT WALL.*

THEN, WHEN I'VE GOT A *GRIP* ON SOMETHING--

--I'LL *LOOK AROUND* A BIT, SEE WHO'S *NEAR* ENUFF FER ME TA DO--

THIS!

HANG *TIGHT,* WYATT... I GOT YA.

BUT--WHAT ABOUT THE *OTHERS?*

THEY CAN HANDLE THEMSELVES, KID. *YOU'LL* SEE.

QUITE SO, BEN GRIMM.

NOW THAT YOU'VE *REAWAKENED* US TO OUR ABILITIES--

--IT'S A SIMPLE MATTER FOR ME TO *SAVE* MYSELF--

--WITH THE AID OF MY WONDROUS *HAIR!*

BUT, WYATT'S *TRIBES-MEN--!*

NO *SWEAT,* MEDUSA! JUST LET ME--

FLAME ON!

--AND THE *HUMAN TORCH* CAN TAKE CARE OF THE *REST!*

FOR A MOMENT THE YOUTH NAMED JOHNNY STORM PONDERS THE PLIGHT OF THE PLUMMETING INDIANS, AND THEN--

IN A NARROW SHAFT LIKE THIS, *ANY-THING* CAN HAPPEN!

THERE'S ONLY *ONE CHANCE*--A TRICK I'VE NEVER TRIED BEFORE--

BUT IF I DON'T *TRY*--WYATT'S PEOPLE ARE *DOOMED!* I'VE GOT TO TRY IT--I'VE *GOT TO!*

BY FLYING IN A *SPIRAL* TOWARD THE BOTTOM OF THE SHAFT, AND BY BRINGING MY FLAME TO *NOVA HEAT*--

--I'LL CREATE A *THERMAL UPDRAFT*--

AND MAYBE--JUST *MAYBE*--IT'LL BE ENOUGH TO SLOW THE INDIANS' *FALL!*

WAIT! SOMETHING'S *HAPPENING!* I CAN *FEEL* IT!

THEY'RE *SLOWING*--BEGINNING TO *FLOAT!*

FAR OUT! IT REALLY *WORKED!*

OKAY, TORCH...YOU PULLED OFF *ONE* MIRACLE. LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN BEAT THE MASTER *TWICE* AT HIS OWN GAME!

A LITTLE *APPLIED HEAT* TO THE SIDE WALLS OF THIS EARTH-SHAFT, SOME *THERMAL GUIDANCE*-- AND--

BINGO! A FRESHLY-WELDED STONE *FLOOR* FOR THE FLOATING TRIBESMEN TO *LAND* ON!

IF I'VE DONE THIS JUST *RIGHT,* THE FLOOR WILL HAVE *COOLED* BY THE TIME THE INDIANS TOUCH DOWN--

OTHERWISE: INSTANT *HOTFOOT!*

BINGO *AGAIN!*

SOME DAYS, I JUST *STUN* MYSELF!

BRETHREN, WE HAVE SEEN *WONDERS* THIS DAY!

LET US THANK OUR FRIENDS FOR *DELIVERING* US FROM A GREAT *EVIL!*

MAYBE YOU BETTER HOLD THE *KUDOS*, SILENT FOX. WE'RE STILL NOT OUT OF *DANGER!*

THE MIRACLE MAN WANTED TO GET *RID* OF US-- AND HE *DID*. MAYBE FOR *GOOD*, IF WE'RE NOT *LUCKY!*

AIN'T YA BEIN' A LITTLE *DRAMATIC*, TORCHIE?

AM I, BEN? *LOOK!*

WHEN HE THREW US DOWN THIS *HOLE* HE CREATED, THE MIRACLE MAN *SEALED OFF* OUR ONLY *EXIT!* *

THERE MUST BE A TON OF *ROCK* UP THERE, BEN!

WE'RE *TRAPPED!*

*LAST ISH. --RT.

I'M AFRAID MY OLD SCHOOL BUDDY IS *CORRECT*, MISTER GRIMM.

I'M SORRY I *INVOLVED* THE THREE OF YOU IN ALL THIS--I SHOULD NEVER HAVE ASKED YOU TO *COME* WITH ME BACK TO *OKLAHOMA!*

SHADDUP, WINGFOOT. I'M *THINKIN'*.

IN CASE YA HADN'T *NOTICED* --WE AIN'T DEAD *YET!*

TRUE, THING... BUT AS FAR AS A CERTAIN BLACK-COSTUMED *VILLAIN* IS CONCERNED, YOU'RE *ALREADY* IN THE PAST TENSE!

THE PITIABLE *FOOLS!*

THEY THOUGHT MY POWER WAS A *TRICK*--

--A *SHAM*, A SIMPLE HYPNOTIST'S *ILLUSION!*

TO THEIR UNDOUBTABLE CHAGRIN, THEY LEARNED HOW TRULY *WRONG* THEY WERE!

IT'S TRUE THAT *ONCE* I TOYED WITH MENTAL AND VISUAL *DECEIT*-- BUT *NO MORE!*

TODAY, MY ABILITIES SURPASS MY *WILDEST* IMAGININGS! TODAY, I CAN SUMMON *AT WILL* ANY REALITY WHICH CLAIMS MY *FANCY!* AND TOMORROW--*TOMORROW*, ALL *CREATION* WILL BE MINE!

ALL THIS I CAN DO-- BECAUSE I STUDIED AT THE FEET OF THE *"SILENT ONES"*-- IMMORTAL INDIANS WHO CONTROLLED THE VERY FORCES OF *NATURE*--

--BUT WHO KNEW SO *LITTLE* ABOUT THE HUMAN SOUL--

--UNTIL THEY STUDIED UNDER *ME!*

A SHAME I DID NOT LET THEM LIVE TO MAKE *USE* OF WHAT THEY'D LEARNED.

THEY HAD TO BE *DESTROYED*... AS *ALL* WILL BE DESTROYED WHO *OPPOSE* ME!

MAN MUST BE MADE TO UNDERSTAND THAT HE EXISTS ONLY TO *SERVE* ME.

EVEN AS MY POWER SERVES MY *WILL*...

...AND MY WILL, MY GLORIOUS *MIND*!

HE LAUGHS, THEN THE LAUGH OF A MADMAN. THE HARSH SOUND ECHOES THROUGH THE EMPTY STREETS OF THE CITY HE HAS CREATED ON THESE BARREN SANDS... AND WHEN THE ECHO RETURNS, IT HAS DEVELOPED A MOCKING TONE...

...FOR THE CITY SEEMS TO RECOGNIZE THAT ITS CREATOR IS INSANE...

...AND THAT THE CITY EXISTS SOLELY BECAUSE OF ONE MAN'S INSANITY!

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

AND IS THIS NOT THE *ULTIMATE* INSANITY--THIS HOLLOW *IMITATION* OF LIFE? THIS POINTLESS *ECHO*-- OF REALITY?

HA HA HA

--BUT THEN--

EH? THE PAVEMENT-- SOMETHING'S LIFTING IT, CRACKING IT--

IT CAN'T BE AN EARTHQUAKE-- THERE ARE NO FAULTS FOR MILES!

AND YET-- WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE, UNLESS--

NO! THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!

THEY'RE DEAD! I SAW THEM DIE-- I MADE THEM DIE WITH MY OWN HANDS!

CCRAK!

THEY CAN'T BE ALIVE! THEY CAN'T BE!

THAT'S A PRETTY ANNOYIN' ATTITUDE YA GOT THERE, MISTER.

DIDN'T YER MOTHER EVER TELL YA--

RRRIPP!

--IT AIN'T POLITE TA SPEAK NO-NO'S ABOUT A DEAD MAN?

IT APPEARS I'VE UNDERESTIMATED YOU, MR. GRIMM.

NEXT TIME I'LL MAKE CERTAIN OF YOUR DEMISE!

THERE AIN'T GONNA BE A NEXT TIME, CHUM!

QUITE SO, MY DEAR "THING"!

THIS WILL BE OUR FINAL CONFRONTATION--

THAT, I PROMISE YOU!

HEREAFTER... YOU MUST FIGHT MY SLAVES!

HEY... WHAT *IS* THIS? SOME SORT OF *LOONEY-TUNE?*

AIN'TCHA *HEARD*, PAL? CREEPS LIKE THESE WENT OUT WITH *"THE GREEN SLIME"*--

HAVE A LITTLE *CLASS*, WILL YA?

I MEAN-- THIS IS *HUMMIL-LYATIN'*!

CHUMP!

WOK!

FLUMP!

ALL RIGHT, BREAK IT UP.

CAN'T YA GUYS UNDER-STAND PLAIN *ENGLISH?*

I SAID BREAK IT UP!

WOTTA REVOLTIN' *DEVELOPMENT.*

OKAY, GANG-- I *WARNED* YA.

NOW I TAKE OFF THE *KID GLOVES!*

HURRY, JOHNNY... IT SEEMS BEN'S IN SOME *DIFFICULTY.*

THOUGH NOT FOR *LONG*, I THINK--!

NO, NOT FOR LONG *AT ALL.*

AHH... AT *LAST!*

FOR A TIME I THOUGHT THE *MEN* WOULD HAVE ALL THE EXCITEMENT.

I'M TIRED OF BEING *MORAL SUPPORT*--

AFTER ALL, A WOMAN CAN ENJOY A FIGHT AS MUCH AS A MAN--

--ESPECIALLY WHEN THAT WOMAN IS MEDUSA!

HAI!

THUMP!

KRAK!

A FREE-FORM SOMERSAULT IN MID-AIR--

--AND WHEN THE SCARLET-TRESSED INHUMAN HAS REGAINED HER FOOTING, SHE SEES--

MORE UNLIVING ONES?

VERY WELL, MY SILENT FRIENDS--

--LET THE BATTLE BEGIN!

MEANWHILE, YET ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE FABULOUS FOURSOME MAKES HIS ENTRANCE--A LITTLE SPECTACULARLY, IT'S TRUE--

BUT THEN, THE HUMAN TORCH IS NOT THE SORT OF YOUNGSTER GIVEN TO UNDERSTATEMENT--

NOT BY A LONG SHOT!

FOOM!

HANG IN THERE, BEN... WE'VE GOT THE MIRACLE MAN'S STOOGES ON THE *RUN!*

IF HE COULD BE HERE NOW, MY BROTHER-IN-LAW REED WOULD BE *PROUD* OF US!

WE'LL CLEAN THINGS UP IN *NO TIME!*

NO! *NO!* ALL MY PLANNING-- MY DREAMS-- I WON'T LET THEM *END* THIS WAY!

I *CHOSE* THIS SECTION OF THE WORLD FOR MY CITY BECAUSE IT WAS ALMOST *UNINHABITED--*

ALMOST, THAT IS-- BUT FOR THOSE BLASTED *INDIANS!* I THOUGHT I'D MANAGED TO LOSE THEM *FOREVER--*

--BUT APPARENTLY I *HAVE NOT!* VERY WELL-- MORE *DRASTIC* MEASURES ARE CALLED FOR!

AND AM I NOT THE MAN WHO CAN MAKE *MIRACLES?*

ARE NOT THE VERY ELEMENTS OF NATURE MINE TO *COMMAND?*

I *SUMMON* YOU-- I *DEMAND* YOUR *PRESENCE!*

HEED ME, WINDS OF THIS WORLD!

"TAKE FROM ME MY ENEMIES!

"COME SWALLOW THEM INTO YOUR WHIRLING MAW--

"SWALLOW THEM, AND CARRY THEM FAR FROM THIS HALLOWED CITY!

"YOUR MASTER COMMANDS IT! AND YOU MUST DO AS YOUR MASTER COMMANDS!"

TWO THOUSAND MILES TO THE EAST, THE FOURTH AND ABSENT MEMBER OF THIS FANTASTIC FOURSOME IS INVOLVED IN PROBLEMS OF HIS OWN.

LET'S EAVES-DROP ON THE MAN CALLED REED RICHARDS-- JUST FOR A MOMENT.

IT'S USELESS. I'M NO CLOSER TO AN ANSWER NOW THAN I WAS AT THE BEGINNING.

ALL THIS WORK-- THE ENDLESS EXPERI-MENTS--AND WHAT HAVE I ACCOM-PLISHED?

I'VE LOST MY WIFE... MY CHILD...EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS TO ME.

AND FOR WHAT? A FRUSTRATING SERIES OF FAILURES.

I'VE ACCOMPLISHED NOTHING. NOTHING!

THAT'S NOT QUITE TRUE, MR. RICHARDS... AS YOU'D SEE IF YOU LOOKED BEHIND YOU...

YOU'D SEE THAT YOUR EXPERIMENTS HAVE PRODUCED RESULTS--

DANGER

NEGATIVE ZONE

RESULTS THE NATURE OF WHICH MUST REMAIN UNKNOWN--AT LEAST UNTIL OUR NEXT ISSUE!

NOW, TO COMPLETE OUR FAMILY PICTURE, WE MUST MOVE A HUNDRED MILES WEST OF MANHAT-TAN--TO THE HILLS OF PENNSYL-VANIA, WHERE WE FIND REED'S ESTRANGED WIFE, SUE--AND THEIR SMALL SON, FRANKLIN.

YOU LIKE CAROL'S HORSES, DON'T YOU, FRANKLIN?

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED THEM-- LOVED RIDING. I NEVER--

HER VOICE BREAKS OFF AT A SCREAM FROM THE REAR OF THE BARN.

EEEEEEEEEEEE

SHE TURNS--AND SEES A SIGHT NO MOTHER SHOULD EVER SEE--

--HER SON--IN THE THROES OF MADNESS!

FRANKLIN!

DEAR LORD! CAROL! CAROL, CALL A DOCTOR!

YOU'VE GOT TO CALL A DOCTOR-- IT'S FRANKLIN! IT'S FRANKLIN!

SUE, WHAT'S WRONG? WHAT'S HAPPENED?

DID ONE OF THE HORSES--? SUE?

IT'S--IT'S OVER NOW, CAROL. WHAT-EVER HAPPENED TO FRANKLIN... IT'S FINISHED. HE'S ASLEEP.

DO YOU WANT ME TO SEND BOB AFTER DOC CRAWFORD?

NO. SOMEHOW I KNOW HE'S ALL RIGHT NOW.

SOMEHOW I KNOW... HE'S ALL RIGHT.

GOT YOUR INTEREST? GOOD. NEXT MONTH--WE PROMISE -- WE'RE GOING TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS JUMPING AROUND IN YOUR HEAD.

RIGHT NOW, THOUGH, THERE ARE A FEW OTHER MYSTERIES TO CLEAR UP, SUCH AS --

WHERE THE HECK ARE WE, ANYWAY?

I THOUGHT THE CYCLONE BIT WENT " OUT WITH THE "WIZARD OF OZ!"

WE APPEAR TO BE SOME MILES SOUTH OF THE KEEWAZI RESERVATION, MR. GRIMM.

UNLESS I'M MISTAKEN, THAT GLOW TO THE NORTH MUST BE THE MIRACLE MAN'S CITY!

DON'T TELL ME, WYATT.

YA CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE-- RIGHT?

WRONG, MR. GRIMM.

THAT RIVER UP AHEAD IS THE KICHUMA... "THE BLUE STREAM."

IT LEADS DIRECTLY TO MY VILLAGE.

THAT'S ALL I HAFTA KNOW, KID.

IF WE'RE GONNA MAKE LIKE HUCK FINN ON THE MISSISSIPPI, WE GOTTA GET OUR-SELVES A RAFT--

BLAKO!

--AND WHAT WITH THE THING KNOCKING DOWN THE TREES, AND THE HUMAN TORCH BURNING OFF THE BRANCHES AND TRIMMING THEM DOWN TO SIZE--

-- AND MEDUSA PUTTING THEM IN PLACE --

-- AND WYATT WINGFOOT ADDING HIS OWN SPECIALIZED WOODCRAFT SKILLS--

--WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY IN NO TIME!

MAY THE GREAT SPIRIT GO WITH YOU, GRANDSON... AND SPEED YOU TO YOUR DESTINY!

SILENT FOX DOES US *HONOR*, JOHNNY... HE USED A BLESSING NORMALLY RESERVED FOR BRAVES RIDING INTO *BATTLE*.

--A BATTLE THEY CAN'T *WIN*.

THEN LET'S RIDE IN *STYLE*, WYATT--

WEEEEOOOO! WATCH OUT, YA CREEPS--

NUTHIN' CAN STOP US *NOW!*

AL'A THE HUMAN TORCH!

A SHORT TIME LATER, IN THE PLAZA OF THE CITY THE MIRACLE MAN HAS CREATED FOR HIS OWN *AMUSEMENT*--

--YET *ANOTHER* CREATION IS IN PROGRESS--

--A CREATION OF A FAR MORE *SINISTER* NATURE THAN THE *FIRST!*

EXCELLENT! *EXCELLENT!* THEY ARE *IDEAL*--

--JUST AS I'VE ALWAYS *IMAGINED* THEY'D BE!

A LITTLE *PALE*, PERHAPS... YET THE RACIAL TYPE IS *PERFECT! PERFECT!*

THERE'S NO *DOUBT* OF IT... YOU ARE MY MOST *EXQUISITE* CREATION.

A LIFETIME OF FANTASTIES *DISTILLED*...

...MY PERFECT *BRIDE!*

BUT WHAT'S THIS? YOU *SHY BACK*-- YOU *SHUDDER* AT MY TOUCH!

HAD I GIVEN YOU A *VOICE*-- YOU'D *SCREAM!*

BAH! YOU'RE JUST LIKE ALL THE *REST*.

BEAUTIFUL... YET *UN-APPROACH-ABLE*.

OUT OF MY *SIGHT*, WOMAN--

YOU *SICKEN* ME!

SO MUCH FOR **MEGALOMANIA**. WE NEED ONLY ONE **FINAL** ELEMENT TO COMPLETE OUR STORY'S FINELY-BALANCED **STRUCTURE**, AND TO FIND THAT ELEMENT WE'LL HAVE TO LOOK IN ON A CERTAIN HIGH-LEVEL GOVERNMENTAL MEETING...

GENERAL HOLMES!

WHAT IS IT, PROFESSOR?

TROUBLE WITH OUR COMMUNIST **FRIENDS?**

I DON'T **THINK** SO, GENERAL... THIS SEEMS AS MUCH OF A THREAT TO **THEM** AS TO **US.**

IT'S ON **CHART FOUR,** GENERAL...

THREAT? WHAT SORT OF THREAT, PROFESSOR?

ACCORDING TO OUR OBSERVATIONS, SOME SORT OF WORLD-WIDE **CHAIN REACTION** IS AFFECTING OUR ATOMIC **STOCKPILES.**

WE'RE NOT CERTAIN AS TO THE **CAUSE**-- BUT THE **EFFECT** IS ALL TOO **CLEAR!**

"ALL ACROSS THE WORLD, CONCENTRATIONS OF **NUCLEAR MATERIAL**-- SUCH AS THOUGHS IN MISSILE WARHEADS, ATOMIC SUBMARINES, OR INDUSTRIAL POWER-PLANTS--ARE RADIATING ELECTRONS AT A FANTASTIC RATE, DESPITE ALL EFFORTS TO **COOL DOWN** THAT INCREASING **REACTION.**

"REPORTS INDICATE THAT SOME OUTSIDE FORCE IS **DRAIN-ING** THE PROTON SUPPLY OF THE WORLD'S RADIO-ACTIVE MATERIAL--

"--THUS **UNBALANCING** THE ALREADY-UNSTABLE ELEMENTS-- "

--A PROCESS THAT CAN RESULT IN ONLY **ONE** THING--

A WORLD-WIDE NUCLEAR **EXPLOSION!**

INCREDIBLE! THE RUSSIANS ARE BEHIND THIS--I'M **SURE** OF IT!

PERHAPS I HAVEN'T MADE MYSELF CLEAR, SIR. IF THIS CHAIN-REACTION CONTINUES... IF THE OUTSIDE FORCE, **WHAT-EVER** IT IS, CONTINUES TO DRAIN THE PROTO-NUCLEAR MATERIAL...

...THE ENTIRE WORLD WILL CEASE TO **EXIST** IN A MATTER OF **HOURS!**

THANK YOU, PROFESSOR. WE'LL CALL YOU IF WE NEED YOU ANY FURTHER.

IF YOU NEED US TO TELL YOU JUST WHO THAT OUTSIDE FORCE IS--THEN BROTHER, YOU'RE IN THE WRONG MAGAZINE! WHO ELSE CAN IT BE BUT--

THE MIRACLE MAN!

HEY, BUDDY-- LONG TIME NO SEE!

WE HAVE A LITTLE UNFINISHED BUSINESS, REMEMBER?

YOU FLAMING FOOL! DARE YOU RETURN HERE--TO TORMENT ME ANEW?

YOU'LL PAY FOR YOUR ARRO-GANCE!

GUESS AGAIN, TWINKLE-TOES.

THIS LIGHT FLARE TRICK WORKED ONCE-- IT SHOULD WORK TWICE!

LIGHTS OUT, CHUCKLES!

MY EYES! YOU'VE BLINDED ME-- I CAN'T SEE!

WITHOUT MY VISION, I CAN'T CONJURE MIRACLES-- I'M HELPLESS!

YA PICK THINGS UP REAL QUICK, PAL.

AN' JUST SO'S YA AIN'T IN ANY DOUBT-- I'M GONNA SPELL IT ALL OUT FER YA, MISTER--

IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!

YOU GO AFTER THE MIRACLE MAN, BEN. WYATT, JOHNNY AND I WILL ATTEND TO HIS ANDROID ARMY!

AND PLEASE MOVE QUICKLY, BEN. THE ODDS DON'T SEEM FAIR, REALLY...

AFTER ALL--WE'RE ONLY OUTNUMBERED *TWENTY TO ONE!*

MOCK ME, WILL YOU? YOU'LL *REGRET* THAT, WOMAN--ALL OF YOU WILL REGRET YOUR ACTIONS TODAY!

THOUGH BLINDED AND UNABLE TO INFLUENCE THE WORLD AROUND ME--I CAN *STILL* AFFECT MY *BODY*--

--MAKING IT GROW *LARGER*--MORE *POWERFUL!*

HOORAY FER *YOU!*

WHOP!

IF YA AIN'T GOT THE *SKILL*, THE SIZE AIN'T WORTH YESTERDAY'S *SUBWAY TOKEN!*

YOU'RE QUITE A *WIT*, MR. GRIMM! BUT WE'LL SEE HOW *WITTY* YOU'LL BE WHEN FACED WITH THE APPROACH OF YOUR OWN *DEATH!*

MY SIGHT IS *RETURNING*, MY FRIEND--AND WITH IT, MY MIRACULOUS *POWER!*

YOU'RE *DOOMED*, MR. GRIMM! *DOOMED*, DO YOU HEAR ME?

DOOMED!

BLUE-EYED BENJAMIN ISN'T THE ONLY ONE--FOR, ALL ACROSS THE GLOBE, AN ALMOST-IRREVERSIBLE CHAIN REACTION IS NEARING ITS CLIMAX--

--A CLIMAX WHICH WILL SURELY SIGNAL THE END OF THE HUMAN RACE!

UNAWARE OF THAT APPROACHING CATASTROPHE, OUR HEROES FIGHT ON-- FROM WYATT WINGFOOT, JOHNNY STORM'S EX-COLLEGE-ROOMMATE--

BOK!

SMAK!

--THROUGH THE CRIMSON-HEADED MEDUSA, WHOSE POWERS DERIVE FROM HER HERITAGE AS AN INHUMAN--

RUMP!

--TO THE SOMEWHAT-EXCITABLE HUMAN TORCH, BROTHER OF SUE RICHARDS, YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE SUPER-POWERED TEAM--

--AND PERHAPS THE MOST UNPREDICTABLE!

OKAY, GANG-- SCATTER!

AND UNLESS YOU WANT A PERMANENT HOTFOOT--

STAY SCATTERED! CAPISH?

I THOUGHT YOU'D CAPISH.

FINALLY, THE THING: THE STRONGEST TEAMMATE... AND CERTAINLY THE MOST TRAGIC. SOME OTHER TIME WE'LL DISCUSS WHAT IT MUST BE LIKE TO LIVE AS AN ORANGE BRICK MONSTER.

RIGHT NOW, HOWEVER--

--WE HAVE FAR MORE **PERTINENT** MATTERS ON OUR MINDS.

WHAM!

STRENGTH IS TO BE **USED**, MR. GRIMM! THOSE WHO **POSSESS** IT--SOON LEARN TO **CONTROL** IT!

I AM NOW **TWICE** YOUR HEIGHT AND WEIGHT--AND **GROWING**, BENJAMIN GRIMM! **GROWING**--TILL I CAN SMASH YOU TO UNFEELING **PULP!**

NOT A **CHANCE**, BUSTER.

THERE'S SUMTHIN' YA JUST DON'T **UNDERSTAND**. SOME GUYS GOT **CLASS**... AND SOME GUYS **DON'T**.

A GUY WITH CLASS WOULD'VE BLINKED US OUTTA **EXISTENCE** WITH THE KINDA POWER YA GOT--

--BUT **YOU**... YER DEFINITELY **SECOND-RATE**.

ALL **YOU** CARE ABOUT IS PROVIN' HOW **TOUGH** YA ARE...

...AND MISTER, IF YA GOTTA **PROVE** IT...YA JUST **AIN'T**.

PREPARE YOURSELF TO **DIE**, YOU BLUNDERING **LUMMOX!**

THOSE WORDS SEALED YOUR **DEATH WARRANT**..

AND I INTEND TO **EXECUTE** THAT WARRANT--

NOW!

WAK!

FORGET IT, PAL.

IT'S LIKE I **SAID**...

CHUP!

WHEN IT COMES RIGHT DOWN TA THE BOTTOM LINE--

BUSTER, YA JUST AIN'T GOT WHAT IT TAKES!

BALOOM!

A HUSH FALLS OVER THE WORLD-- AND AS THE MIRACLE MAN SLUMPS INTO TEMPORARY **UNCONSCIOUSNESS,** THE CITY HE'S CREATED **FADES**-- LEAVING ONLY OUR HEROES-- AND THE UNCHANGING, UNCHANGEABLE **DESERT SANDS**...

IT'S **OVER**-- ISN'T IT, BEN?

HE'S **FALLEN**... MY PEOPLE ARE FREE TO RETURN **HOME!**

COOKS THAT WAY.

STILL... DON'T GO CELEBRATIN' **YET.** I'VE GOTTA FEELIN' WE--

BUT, BEFORE THE THING CAN **FINISH** HIS SENTENCE, THE UNMOVING FIGURE **STIRS**--

--**SHIFTS**--

--AND GLOWING MORE BRIGHTLY THAN **BEFORE**-- RISES ON TREMBLING LEGS!

IMBECILES!

ARE YOU **YET** BLIND TO THE TRUTH?

MINE IS THE GLORY OF POWER INCARNATE!

I AM TIME! I AM LIFE! I AM ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN-- ALL POWER UNTO MYSELF!

I--AM--ETERRRNNN-NNNNITTTYYYyvv-

POIT!

JOHNNY... BEN... THE MIRACLE MAN'S GONE!

HE VANISHED IN A BURST OF LIGHT... BUT WHY?

THERE'S THE ANSWER, WYATT-- LOOK!

WE ARE THE CHEEMUZWA ... THE SILENT ONES.

WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MADNESS OF THE ONE YOU CALL "MIRACLE MAN"...

...AND WE HAVE TAKEN HIM AWAY... THAT WE MAY SOME-DAY CURE HIM.

PERHAPS WE MAY TEACH HIM TO STRIVE NOT SO STRONGLY AGAINST HIS MORTALITY--

--FOR THEREIN LIES HIS ANGUISH, AND HIS NEED FOR ABSOLUTE POWER.

HE MUST ACCEPT THE FACT OF HIS EVENTUAL DEATH, AS WE HAVE--AND SEE IT NOT AS AN ENDING--

--BUT AS A DOORWAY-- TO A DIFFERENT LIFE--

--AND A NEW-- BEGINNINNNGGGGG...

SAY... DIDN'T MIRACLE MAN SAY HE'D BUMPED OFF THE CHEEMUZWA'S?

'CAUSE IF HE DID-- AN' THAT WUZ THEM--

--THEN THEY WUZ--

ULP!

AND SO IT ENDS. ELSEWHERE, HOWEVER, THE SCENE ISN'T AS OPTIMISTIC.

ELSEWHERE, THE SCENE IS DISTINCTLY OMINOUS... AND MORE THAN A LITTLE THREATEN-ING...

WHAT HIDES BEHIND THE ARMORED DOOR? WHAT NEW MENACE WAITS TO PLAGUE OUR HEROES ON THEIR RETURN TO MANHATTAN? YOU'LL FIND THE ANSWER IN OUR NEXT ISSUE, WHEN WE FEATURE...

DANGER

NEGATIVE ZONE

THE WORLD BETWEEN!

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ CC | 140 NOV 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

TM

I'VE SMASHED THE THING--

I'VE CRUSHED THE HUMAN TORCH--

I'VE BLASTED MEDUSA AND MR. FANTASTIC--

BUCKLER & GIACOIA

AND NOW-- ANNIHILUS RULES TWO WORLDS!

GUESS AGAIN, DINGBAT-- 'CAUSE THE F.F. DON'T GIVE UP-- TILL WE'RE DEAD!!

AN' WE AIN'T DEAD YET!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

GERRY CONWAY WRITER * JOHN BUSCEMA ARTIST * JOE SINNOTT EMBELLISHER * JOHN COSTANZA, letterer GEORGE ROUSSOS, colorist * ROY THOMAS EDITOR

WELCOME TO-- THE NEGATIVE ZONE!

HERE IN THIS UNIVERSE BESIDE OUR OWN, THE LAWS OF NATURE ARE SUBTLY ALTERED. HERE MANKIND DOES NOT EXIST... NOR DO MANY OTHER INTELLIGENT LIFE FORMS... BUT THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW!

HE IS CALLED ANNIHILUS, A NAME HE HAS CHOSEN FOR HIMSELF. HIS OVERWHELMING DESIRE: IMMORTALITY.

HIS IMMEDIATE GOAL: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

NEARER, EVER NEARER! THE ENTRANCE TO HUMAN SPACE IS JUST AHEAD OF ME--!

IN MERE MOMENTS-- VENGEANCE WILL BE MINE!

FOR REASONS THAT'LL BECOME OBVIOUS LATER, THIS ONE IS CALLED--

ANNIHILUS REVEALED!

1644 Z

TOO LONG HAVE I ALLOWED THE BITTERNESS OF MY DEFEATS TO FESTER WITHIN ME!

TOO LONG HAVE I WAITED--TOO LONG HAVE I PLANNED! AT LAST IT IS TIME TO ACT--!

AT LAST-- I HAVE THE INFORMATION I NEED TO DESTROY THEM ALL!

IT WAS REED RICHARDS WHO FIRST HUMILIATED ME, THOSE MANY MONTHS AGO* --AND HE SHALL BE THE FIRST TO PAY!

HOW FITTING THAT THE VERY PERSON WHOSE LIFE HE CAME HERE TO SAVE-- HIS SON-- SHALL BE THE AGENT OF HIS DESTRUCTION!

*FF ANNUAL #6. --RT.

YET-- IS LIFE NOT IRONIC, IF NOTHING ELSE?

AND IS NOT ANNIHILUS ITS GREATEST IRONY?

AHH... AHEAD OF ME, THE DISTORTION AREA, WHERE NORMAL SPACE MEETS THE BORDERS OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE.

I HAVE ARRIVED.

SOON, REED RICHARDS... VERY SOON, YOU'LL BE BEGGING FOR MERCY AT MY HAND.

THEN--ONLY THEN WILL THE PAIN OF DEFEAT BE WASHED FROM ME.

THEN-- ONLY THEN-- WILL I BE TRULY FREE!

AND WHAT OF ME, MONSTER? WHEN SHALL I BE FREED?

WHEN MY ENTIRE WORLD LIES HELPLESS AT YOUR FEET?

YOU! YOU DARE FOLLOW ME HERE?

KNOW THIS, MY HAPLESS PRISONER ...YOU LIVE NOW ONLY BECAUSE YOU ARE OF USE TO ME.

SOON THAT USE-FULNESS WILL BE AT AN END...

...SO CHOOSE YOUR NEXT WORDS CAREFULLY.

YOUR LIFE--AND PERHAPS THE LIVES OF ALL THE PEOPLE OF EARTH--MAY WELL DEPEND ON THEM!

FOR IN MOMENTS..

--MERE MINUTES..

--ANNIHILUS WILL RULE OVER ALL!

BLAST IT-- I'VE PUT TOO MUCH *LEAD* IN THE SOLDER.

THE ANTI-MATTER GUN IS *RUINED*... COMPLETELY *USELESS!*

ALL THESE MONTHS OF WORK, EXPERIMENTING WITH DIFFERENT *ISOTOPES*, EXPLORING ENDLESS *ALTERNATIVE* ELEMENTS...

...TO HAVE IT END LIKE *THIS*...

...DESTROYED BECAUSE OF A DEFECTIVE *SOLDER!*

STILL... IT DOESN'T REALLY SEEM TO *MATTER.*

WITHOUT SUE AND MY SON-- THE ENTIRE *EXPERIMENT* IS POINTLESS.

AS IS SO *MUCH* OF MY LIFE SINCE SHE LEFT.

WAIT--THAT *SOUND*, COMING FROM THE *ROOF!*

IT'S THE *POGO PLANE!* THE OTHERS MUST BE BACK FROM *OKLAHOMA!**

* WHERE THEY WENT WITH WYATT WINGFOOT *TWO ISSUES* AGO! --RT.

YOU DON'T SEEM TOO PLEASED TO *SEE* US, REED.

MEDUSA'S *RIGHT*, STRETCHO. YA LOOK ABOUT AS HAPPY AS A PREACHER AT AN *ORGY.*

WHAT'S *WRONG*, BROTHER-IN-LAW?

THE *LAST* TIME I SAW YOU LOOK THIS WAY-- IT WAS WHEN *SUE* LEFT.

HAS SIS *CALLED*-- IS THERE SOME SORT OF *TROUBLE*--?

NOTHING LIKE *THAT*, JOHNNY.

JUST AN *EXPERIMENT* OF MINE... THAT DIDN'T QUITE *WORK OUT.*

YA DON'T *SAY.* THAT'S A REGULAR *TRAGEDY*, HIGH-POCKETS... A REAL BIT OF *BAD LUCK.*

YA WIFE'S GONE OFF AN' *LEFT* YA, YA DON'T KNOW WHERE YER OWN *KID* IS, *WE* ALMOST GOT OUR-SELVES KILT BY THE *MIRACLE MAN**--

--AND *YER* ALL SHOOK UP OVER A FEW BROKEN *TEST TUBES!*

BUSTER, YER *SUMTHIN' ELSE!*

* ALSO LAST ISH. --RT.

BEN, I HARDLY THINK THAT'S *FAIR*. YOU *KNOW* HOW REED'S BEEN DISTRACTED LATELY.

YEAH, YEAH. I *APOLOGIZE*, STRETCH.

THAT ISN'T *NECESS-ARY*, BEN. WE BOTH--

BREEE

THE *MONITOR ALARM!*

BREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

THAT'S THE *PRIVATE CIRCUIT*... ONLY ONE OTHER PERSON IN THE WORLD OUTSIDE OF THE FOUR OF US *KNOWS* THAT NUMBER!

IT *HAS* TO BE HER--

LORD IN *HEAVEN*... PLEASE, PLEASE LET IT BE *SUE!*

AS SUDDENLY AS IT BEGAN, THE MONITOR ALARM **CUTS OFF**-- AND IN ITS PLACE, A SOFT ELECTRONIC **HUM** SPRINGS UP, ACCOMPANYING THE BLUE **GLOW** FROM AN ACTIVATED **VIEW SCREEN**...

REED! THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE AT THE **BAXTER BUILDING.**

I DON'T KNOW **WHAT** I WOULD HAVE DONE IF--

DARLING, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

ARE YOU COMING BA-

REED, IT'S **FRANKLIN.** SOMETHING'S **HAPPENING** TO HIM... HE'S BEEN ACTING TERRIBLY **ODD.** I'M WORRIED ABOUT HIM...

I WAS HOPING THAT **YOU...**

ANYTHING, SUE. TELL ME WHERE YOU ARE... I'LL BE THERE ***IMMEDIATELY.***

THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE *PICTURE.*

YOU'RE *FADING OUT*-- I CAN'T *SEE*--

CLICK

HUMMMM

REED, WHO **WAS** IT? WHAT'S GOING **ON?**

YEAH, STRETCH, WHO--?

SHE'S *GONE!* WE'VE BEEN *DISCONNECTED!*

I HAVE TO *FIND* HER--

HAVE TO *HELP* HER, BEFORE IT'S *TOO LATE!*

WHOA, PARTNER!

YER GOIN' AFTER THIS *ALL WRONG!*

I SAID **SLOW DOWN!**

YOU DON'T *UNDERSTAND*-- IT WAS *SUE!* SHE *NEEDS* ME!

NOTHING ELSE *MATTERS* BUT THAT--I HAVE TO GO TO HER, I HAVE TO FIND OUT WHAT'S *WRONG* BEFORE SHE--

SWAK!

I SAID HE HADDA *SLOW DOWN*-- I DIDN'T SAY YOU HAD CONK HIM WITH A *WRENCH!*

I'M *SORRY.* I WASN'T *THINKING.*

IT WAS JUST THAT I WANTED TO *HELP!*

DO ME A *FAVOR,* RED.

DON'T DO ME ANY *FAVORS!*

...USELESS! THE VIEW SCREEN IS COMPLETELY *DEAD.*

COULD IT BE HE DOESN'T *WANT* TO HELP ME? THAT *HE'S* CUT OFF COMMUNICATION--

--BECAUSE HE DOESN'T WANT TO *SPEAK* WITH ME?

NO! I MUSTN'T *BELIEVE* THAT OF HIM... HE'S MY *HUSBAND...*

... THE FATHER OF MY *CHILD!*

HE *COULDN'T* BE SO *CRUEL.*

NOW, SUE... YOU KNOW REED *LOVES* YOU. YOU AND HE HAVE HAD YOUR *DIFFERENCES...* MAYBE YOU'VE BEEN A LITTLE *UNSURE* LATELY...

...BUT YOU *HAVE* TO BELIEVE HE STILL LOVES YOU... AND YOU LOVE HIM.

CAROL'S *RIGHT,* SUE.

MAYBE IT'S TIME YOU WENT *HOME.*

DO I HAVE ANY OTHER *CHOICE?* YOU *SAW* HOW FRANKIN WENT INTO A *FIT** YESTERDAY--!

I *CAN'T* TAKE CHANCES WITH THE LIFE OF MY *SON.*

IS THAT THE *ONLY* REASON YOU'RE GOING BACK TO REED?

*LAST ISH. --RT.

TO BE PERFECTLY **HONEST,** CAROL... I JUST DON'T **KNOW.**

FOR SUE RICHARDS, THESE PAST FEW WEEKS IN PENNSYLVANIA HAVE BEEN A **VACATION** FROM RESPONSIBILITY... A PERIOD OF DISCOVERY AND GROWING **SELF-AWARENESS** OF HER IDENTITY AS A WOMAN.

NOW, THE VACATION IS COMING TO AN **END...**

...A QUITE **ABRUPT** ENDING INDEED!

WHAT...? THE **STEERING WHEEL!**

IT'S WRENCHING OUT OF MY **CONTROL,** TURNING...

IT **CAN'T** BE! THE CAR'S DRIVING **ITSELF!**

A **FORCE-BUBBLE..**

I HAVE TO CREATE A **SHIELD** TO PROTECT FRANKLIN.

I CAN'T LET ANYTHING HAPPEN TO **HIM--**

--NO MATTER **WHAT** HAPPENS TO **ME!**

THEN, AFTER SEVERAL WILD MOMENTS OF FRANTIC, BODY-JARRING **HYSTERIA...**

SCREEECH!

AH. **THERE** YOU ARE, MY DEAR. I'VE BEEN **WORRIED** ABOUT YOU... **AND** ABOUT OUR DEAR LITTLE **FRANKLIN.**

WHY, YOU SEEM **STUNNED,** SUSAN. DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE--

--AGATHA HARKNESS --YOUR OLD GOVERNESS.

I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO *REACH* YOU FOR SEVERAL DAYS, SUSAN.

I'M AFRAID IT WAS *I* WHO CAUSED YOUR SON TO HAVE HIS *FIT*--

MY EFFORTS TO CONTACT YOU BECAME TOO-- *UNRESTRAINED.*

IS SOMETHING *WRONG?* IS *THAT* WHY YOU WANTED TO GET IN TOUCH WITH ME?

IT'S ABOUT *FRANKLIN,* ISN'T IT? I CAN *SENSE* THERE'S SOMETHING YOU WANT TO *TELL* ME ABOUT HIM!

YES, SUSAN... IT CONCERNS YOUR SON... AND IT CONCERNS *YOU.*

BUT... THIS IS NOT THE PLACE TO *DISCUSS* SUCH MATTERS.

WILL YOU *COME* WITH ME? OF YOUR OWN FREE *WILL?*

OF COURSE, MISS HARKNESS.

THEN, LET THE SPELL *BEGIN!*

HEAVEN ABOVE, EARTH BELOW, DO NOT OUR SPEEDY PASSAGE SLOW--

FOOM!

BUT LET US FLY FROM THEE THIS INSTANT, TO REACH THAT PLACE SO FAR--SO DISTANT!

SEVERAL HOURS LATER,* IN THE DARKENING SKY OVER EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA, FOUR GRIM-FEATURED FRIENDS FACE INTO A RUSHING WIND, HEADING TOWARD DESTINY IN A SLEEKLY SPEEDING FANTASTI-CAR...

BLASTED HUMAN FISH! IT'S HIS FAULT WE'RE LATE--

* TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED IN THE INTERIM, CHECK OUT SUB-MARINER #67 ON SALE NOW! --RT.

IF THE SUB-MARINER HADN'T'A SHOWN UP, WE'D'VE BEEN THERE BY NOW.

SAY... UH, REED... I AIN'T REALLY APOLOGIZED YET FOR WHAT HAPPENED TA YA BACK THERE.

I DIDN'T MEAN FOR MEDUSA TA GO AN SOCK YA ONE.

I KNOW, BEN... BUT PERHAPS I DESERVED IT.

THESE PAST WEEKS, I HAVEN'T MUCH OF A TEAM-MATE.

I'M SORRY ABOUT THAT... VERY SORRY, OLD FRIEND.

YEAH, WELL... WE ALL GO KINDA NUTTY SUMTIMES.

HEY... THERE'S THE FARM SUZIE'S BEEN STAYIN' AT. NOW WE'LL GET SOME ANSWERS!

UNFORTUNATELY, THE ONLY ANSWERS AVAILABLE ARE SOMEWHAT NEGATIVE, AS OUR HEROES SOON FIND OUT...

SHE LEFT HOURS AGO, REED.

YOU MEAN SHE NEVER REACHED MANHAT-TAN?

MAYBE WE PASSED HER, STRETCH.

YA NEVER KNOW ABOUT--

WRONG, BEN. THERE'S NO POINT DENYING IT... SOMETHING'S HAPPENED TO HER!

STILL-- THERE MAY BE A WAY TO TRACE HER PATH. HER CAR WAS FROM OUR PRIVATE GARAGE--

AS SUCH, IT HAS A BUILT-IN HOMING DEVICE WHICH SHOULD SHOW US--

THERE! SHE'S ABOUT SIXTEEN MILES EAST OF HERE!

HURRY. WE CAN'T WASTE A MOMENT...

...FOR ALL WE KNOW, SUE MAY BE IN TERRIBLE DANGER!

SWOOOOOSH!

WITHIN MOMENTS, REED RICHARD'S INCREDIBLE JET-CAR HAS COVERED THE MILES INDICATED ON THE FLICKING HOMING SCREEN... AND AS THE FANTASTI-CAR NEARS THE END OF ITS FRANTIC FLIGHT...

HEY, THING... WATCH IT!

THESE TREES ARE PRETTY CLOSE.. THIS ISN'T AN OBSTACLE COURSE YOU KNOW!

STIFFLE YERSELF, TORCHIE. I WUZ JOCKEYING BIRDS LIKE THIS BEFORE YA WERE BORN.

WELL, HIGH POCKETS? HOW MUCH FARTHER HAVE WE GOT TA GO, ANYWAY?

JUST ANOTHER HUNDRED YARDS, BEN.

WE'RE ALMOST--

THERE!

THAT'S HER CAR BELOW, NEAR THAT SCORCHED AREA.

BUT SUE-- SHE'S GONE!

I'VE SEEN CHARRED GROUND LIKE THAT BEFORE... AND THERE'S ONLY ONE POSSIBLE EXPLANATION.

I PRAY IT ISN'T TRUE, BUT I HAVE TO CHECK--

--SUE'S LIFE MAY DEPEND ON OUR HAVING THE PROPER INFORMATION!

HER LIFE? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I CAN'T TELL YOU, JOHNNY. IT HAS TO DO WITH THE EXPERIMENT I'VE BEEN WORKING ON.

WHAT THE HECK IS THAT GIZMO, STRETCH? A CRAZY GEIGER COUNTER?

OF A SORT, BEN. THIS DEVICE MEASURES A DIFFERENT FORM OF RADIATION...

...AND ACCORDING TO MY READINGS... THIS AREA IS SATURATED WITH IT.

RADIATION? HERE... IN THE MIDDLE OF A PENNSYLVANIAN VALLEY?

WHAT KIND OF RADIATION IS IT, REED RICHARDS?

IT'S JUST WHAT I'VE ALWAYS FEARED, MEDUSA. ANTI-MATTER PARTICLES... OF A SORT FOUND IN ONLY ONE PLACE...

...THE NEGATIVE ZONE!

THIRTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER, IN THE MAIN CORRIDOR OF THE FF'S PRIVATE HEADQUARTERS...

YA FIGGER WE GOTTA GO HUNTIN' IN SUB-SPACE, HUH, STRETCHO?

WE HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE, BEN. WHO-EVER... OR WHATEVER TOOK SUE AND FRANKLIN... HAS TO HAVE ORIGINATED THERE.

SAY, REED... WHERE DO YOU SUPPOSE WYATT'S HIDING?

WE LEFT HIM HERE AT THE MONITORS IN CASE-- HUH?

HOLY COW! LOOK!

THE ENTRANCE TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE... SMASHED OPEN FROM WITHIN!

HEAVEN HELP US, IT'S ALREADY BEGUN!

ON THE CONTRARY, REED RICHARDS. THE GAME HAS ALREADY ENDED.

WHAT OCCURS HEREAFTER IS ONLY A DENOUEMENT.

YOU SEEMED STUNNED, UNBELIEVING. YOU WONDER IF PERHAPS YOUR SENSES BETRAY YOU.

I'M AFRAID NOT. I AM INDEED WHO YOU THINK I AM...

...THE HARBINGER OF YOUR DOOM, THE AGENT OF YOUR DEATHS...

...ANNIHILUS, THE IMMORTAL!

ANNIHILUS, MASTER OF HIS UNIVERSE--AND SOON, YOUR OWN!

I HAD A *FEELING* YOU WUZ THE JOKER *BEHIND* ALL THIS.

WELL, BUSTER... YER GONNA *REGRET* TANGLIN' WITH US AGAIN. WE BEAT YA *TWICE,* AN' NOW WE'RE GONNA BEAT YA--

AAGAAAIIIINNNN

KRAK

CRUNCH!

YOU BLUNDERING *BUMBLER.*

DID YOU TRULY BELIEVE I'D COME *UNPREPARED?* ANNIHILUS IS STRONGER THAN *ANY* IN YOUR WORLD!

THAT MAY BE *TRUE,* INSECT-FACE... BUT STRENGTH ISN'T *EVERYTHING.*

WHICH MAYBE YOU'LL *SEE,* AS SOON AS I--

FLAME ON!

AHH... THE REMARKABLE *HUMAN TORCH!* YOUR POWER *STILL* AMAZES ME, YOUTH... BUT IT NO LONGER *AFFECTS* ME.

I AM NOW *IMPERVIOUS* TO YOUR FLAMES, BUT YOU, I FEAR, ARE *NOT* IMPERVIOUS TO THE BLASTING EFFECT OF MY INVINCIBLE--

--COSMIC CONTROL ROD!

FOOM!

JOHNNY'S OUT OF THE *FIGHT*, MEDUSA. IF WE'RE TO *SURVIVE*, YOU AND I *MUST* DEFEAT HIM *QUICKLY!*

STRETCH MY BODY OUT AS FAR AS YOU *CAN*--

I HAVE TO REACH A *MAXIMUM FRICTION SPEED* FOR THIS *WIND BOMB* TO FUNCTION PROPERLY! IT'S OUR ONLY *HOPE*--OUR LAST *CHANCE!*

ON MY COMMAND, *RELEASE* ME--

NOW!

SWISSSSH!

DON'T *MOVE*, MEDUSA! I'LL BRING MY BODY AROUND-- *SHIELD* YOU FROM THE BLAST!

IT SHOULD BE AS POWERFUL AS A CONCENTRATED *HURRICANE!*

WHACHOOM!

FOR SEVERAL AGONIZING SECONDS, SMOKE *SWIRLS* THROUGH THE RUBBLE-STREWN *CHAMBER*... BUT WHEN IT *CLEARS*...

...ANNIHILUS STANDS *UNHARMED!*

WE HAVE DANCED *LONG ENOUGH*. THIS BATTLE CEASES TO *AMUSE* ME.

LET IT BE *FINISHED*... *AT ONCE!*

CHUMP!

A MOMENT OF CRACKLING ENERGY, OF SEARING PAIN... AND THEN...

...ALL IS SILENCE.

A QUIET AS STILL AS THE GRAVE.

A MOST SATISFACTORY PROLOGUE... ONE THAT AMPLY FULFILLS MY EXPECTATIONS.

SOON IT WILL BE TIME FOR THE NEXT ACT IN THIS LITTLE PLAY... BUT FIRST...

...THERE IS ONE OTHER MATTER TO ATTEND TO!

MY HEAD FEELS LIKE A PUNCHING BAG... WHAT...?

YOU'RE FORTUNATE YOU'RE STILL ALIVE, EARTHLING.

I DID NOT EXPECT TO FIND A FIFTH MEMBER OF THIS ACCURSED TEAM OF REED RICHARD'S DEVISING...

HAD I SENT ONE OF MY SLAVES TO CLEAR THE WAY FOR MY ENTRANCE..., YOU'D BE DEAD NOW.

JOHNNY DESCRIBED YOU TO ME... YOU MUST BE THAT ALIEN MADMAN CALLED ANNIHILUS.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU WANT WITH ME, MY FRIEND-- BUT I PROMISE YOU THIS, WYATT WINGFOOT WILL NOT--

SILENCE, TALL ONE. YOU'LL SPEAK WHEN I COMMAND...

...AND AS FOR ANY THOUGHTS YOU MAY HAVE ABOUT ATTACKING ME...

...YOU'D BETTER RID YOURSELF OF THEM IMMEDIATELY.

MY WRISTS --THEY'RE EMBEDDED IN SOME SORT OF SOLIDIFIED ENERGY!

THIS IS INSANE-- UTTERLY FANTASTIC!

NO MORE FANTASTIC THAN MY *OWN* STORY, WYATT WINGFOOT.

IT WILL AMUSE ME TO *RELATE* IT TO YOU-- SO THAT YOU MAY UNDERSTAND THE *HOW* OF YOUR APPROACH-ING DOOM--

--AND REALIZE THAT BUT FOR THE MEREST TWIST OF *FATE*, YOU MIGHT HAVE LIVED TO SEE ANOTHER *SUNSET* ON THIS PETTY PLANET *EARTH*.

IT BEGAN SOME *ONE THOUSAND YEARS AGO*, ON A PLANET AT THE VERY *CORE* OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE... A PLANET IN THE *THROES* OF CREATION!

FOR COUNTLESS EONS THE SURFACE OF THAT WORLD HAD BEEN *COVERED* WITH CLOUDS OF ASH AND MIST...

"...CLOUDS *EXHALED* BY THE TOWERING VOLCANOES WHICH DOTTED THE PLANET'S SURFACE, LIKE BOILS UPON A LEPER...

"IT WAS A GREAT DEAL LIKE YOUR *EARTH* A MILLION YEARS AGO...

"THERE WERE *BEASTS* UPON THE SURFACE OF THAT WORLD, CREATURES *UNDREAMED* OF IN YOUR MOST HIDEOUS *NIGHTMARES*. THEY WERE SLOW, UNTHINKING MONSTERS... NONE AMONG THEM HAD *BRAIN* ENOUGH TO QUALIFY AS *SENTIENT*...

"NONE, THAT IS, BUT *ONE*.

"HE ROSE OUT OF THE QUAGMIRE IN MUCH THE SAME WAY AS YOUR FIRST *MAMMAL* MUST HAVE DONE. HIS BODY WAS HARD, A GLISTENING, CHITINOUS *SHELL*... FOR, UNLIKE THE CREATURES WHICH CAME TO DOMINANCE ON *EARTH*, HE WAS AN *ARTHROPOD*... AN *INSECT*.

"AND HE COULD *THINK*...

COLD... WHY AM I *COLD*?

MUST FIND *WARMTH*... BEFORE I *FREEZE*!

WHY AM I **DIFFERENT** FROM THE OTHERS? THEY WATCH ME... AND THEY **HATE** ME, BECAUSE I AM DIFFERENT.

WHAT **MAKES** ME DIFFERENT? **WHAT?**

"IT WAS HIS VERY ABILITY TO **ASK** THAT QUESTION WHICH ALIENATED HIM...

"...BUT THAT WAS SOMETHING HE WOULD NOT **REALIZE** UNTIL MUCH LATER... AND IN THE **MEANTIME**, HE WAS BRUTALLY **ATTACKED!**

ARRRRRRRR

I MUST **RUN**... HIDE FROM THOSE WHO ARE NOT LIKE ME!

THE **HATE** ME... WANT TO **KILL** ME.

SOMEDAY... I WILL KILL **THEM!**

"FOR DAYS HE RAN, AND EVEYWHERE HE WENT, HE FOUND HATRED AND **FEAR**...! FINALLY, AS HE REACHED THE VERY **LIMITS** OF HIS ENDURANCE, HE FOUND...

"...THE **SHIP.**

BIG STONE **GLOWS**... ALL BRIGHT AND **SHINY.** IT LOOKS **WARM**...

MAYBE THERE I CAN **HIDE**, IN THE LIGHT AND THE WARMTH...! MAYBE THERE, THE OTHERS WILL LEAVE ME **ALONE**...

"THERE IS NO WAY TO DESCRIBE THE **SIZE** OF THAT VESSEL; IT GOES **BEYOND** THE POTENTIAL OF YOUR LANGUAGE...

"SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT HE WAS **DWARFED** BY ITS IMMENSITY... SO DWARFED HE DID NOT **NOTICE** THE ODD CANNISTERS LYING NEAR THE MASSIVE **PORTAL.**

"BODIES... SKELETONS EVERYWHERE... THE SHIP STANK OF DEATH AND DECAY. THE MUSTY ODOR OF AN ANCIENT TOMB.

"AT FIRST HE WAS TOO FRIGHTENED TO BE CURIOUS...

"... THEN HE SAW... THE HELMET.

THIS IS LIKE HEAD... ONLY OPEN. IS IT SUPPOSED TO COVER HEAD... TO KEEP IT FROM BEING COLD?

PERHAPS IT WILL COVER MY HEAD.

I WILL TRY IT AND SEE.

"TO HIS FEEBLE MIND, IT SEEMED AS THOUGH THE WORLD EXPLODED -- LIGHT AND COLOR FILLED HIM, AND A THUNDEROUS ROARING BLOTTED ALL THOUGHT FROM HIS BRAIN.

"INTO THE VACUUM THUS CREATED CAME IMAGES...

"... VISIONS OF A GALAXY IMMEASUREABLY DISTANT FROM HIS OWN... OF A WORLD GLOWING WITH LIGHT AND POWER.

"A VOICE CAME THEN... AND SPOKE TO HIM.

STRANGER, THIS IS MY HOMELAND. LOOK UPON IT AND WEEP, FOR BY THE DAY ONE OF YOU SHALL COME TO THIS PLACE AND UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU SEE...

...THE LAND OF TYANNA WILL BE LONG PAST... ITS PEOPLE LONG FORGOTTEN.

OURS WAS A *NOBLE* RACE. WE STOOD TALL AND PROUD, AND TRIED TO REACH HEIGHTS *DENIED* ALL OTHER SPECIES.

YET, WE WERE A *PROUD* RACE AS WELL...

...AND OUR PRIDE LED US TO *ARROGANCE*. WE BUILT VAST *FACTORIES*, IN WHICH WE MANUFACTURED THE SEEDS OF *LIFE*... AND WE SEALED THOSE LIVING SPORES IN GOLDEN *CANNISTERS OF POWER*, THAT THEY MIGHT SURVIVE THE RIGORS OF AN INCREDIBLE *VOYAGE*...

...A VOYAGE TO SEED THE *STARS!*

IN OUR ARROGANCE, WE THOUGHT OURSELVES THE *MASTERS* OF THE UNIVERSE... AND AS ITS MASTERS, WE ASSUMED IT OUR *DUTY* TO SPREAD THE BLESSING OF LIFE WHERE *WE* CHOSE THAT IT SHOULD GO...

THE UNIVERSE, HOWEVER, *DISAGREED* WITH US.

A FREAK ACCIDENT *CRIPPLED* THE SEED SHIP OF WHICH I WAS *CAPTAIN*-- RETURNING TO THE UNIVERSE ITS *RIGHT* AND *PRIVILEGE* TO DECIDE SUCH MATTERS BY RANDOM *CHANCE*--

FOR IT WAS RANDOM CHANCE *ALONE* WHICH BROUGHT US TO THIS BARREN *NIGHTMARE* OF A PLANET...

...MAROONING US *FOREVER* ON ITS DARK, VOLCANIC *SURFACE.*

CAPTAIN, WE'RE *DOWN.* ALL THE MAIN ENGINES ARE *DEAD*... WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH POWER LEFT TO RAISE THIS SHIP AN *INCH.*

AND THE *FOOD PROCESSORS?*

WHAT ABOUT *THEM?*

COMPLETELY *DEMOLISHED,* CAPTAIN.

WE'RE *FINISHED.*

NOT *QUITE* FINISHED. WE STILL HAVE THE *CANISTERS.*

WE *MUST* DISCHARGE OUR DUTY...!

AS YOU *COMMAND,* CAPTAIN.

IT WILL BE *DONE.*

AWAY WITH YOU, LITTLE ONES. GO FORTH ON THIS PLANET AND *MULTIPLY...*

PERHAPS SOMEDAY YOU'LL EVOLVE INTO *MEN*... AND WHEN THAT DAY COMES...

...A *LEGACY* WILL AWAIT YOU... THE RECORD OF ONE RACE AND ITS FUTILE *ARROGANCE...*

...AND THE PRIDE WHICH GAVE YOU *LIFE!*

WE *STARVED* TO DEATH, MY CHILD... I AM THE *LAST* TO DIE.

THERE ARE *SECRETS* I MUST TELL YOU... WONDERS AND POWERS WHICH WILL NOW BE *YOURS...*

...BUT YOU MUST *LISTEN...* YOU MUST LISTEN VERY WELL...

"AND HE DID LISTEN... AND HE LEARNED FROM THE RECORDING HELMET...

"...AND AS HE LEARNED HE *REALIZED* THAT TRUE POWER WAS NOW HIS, THAT HE COULD HAVE *REVENGE* ON THOSE WHO ONCE *ATTACKED* HIM...

"FOR HE WAS MORE POWERFUL THAN *THEM ALL!*"

I WAS THE LOWLY INSECT, WYATT WINGFOOT. FOR TEN CENTURIES, I HAVE *GROWN* IN INTELLIGENCE AND IN *STRENGTH*...

I HAVE TAKEN POWER FROM THE *LIFE CANISTERS* ...AND HAVE CREATED MY *COSMIC CONTROL ROD*...

...BUT AFTER *TODAY*, THE ULTIMATE IN POWER WILL BE *MINE*...

...POWER WHICH WILL *DWARF* WHAT STRENGTH I HAVE...

...EVEN AS THE ALIEN *SPACESHIP* ONCE DWARFED *ME!*

BUT-- WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH THE *FANTASTIC FOUR*? OR WITH *ME*?

WHAT POSSIBLE *USE* CAN WE--?

EARTHLING, YOU DO NOT *UNDERSTAND.*

YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS ARE THE VERY *CRUX* OF MY PLAN--

--THE ESSENTIAL *ELEMENT*..

--THE LAST PIECES OF A DIMENSION-SPANNING *PUZZLE!*

WITH YOUR COMPLETE AND TOTAL *DESTRUCTION*, I WILL HAVE BOTH MY *REVENGE*-- AND ENERGY BEYOND MY MOST GLORIOUS *IMAGININGS!*

ENJOY YOUR FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE *NEGATIVE ZONE*, WYATT WINGFOOT.

IT SHALL BE YOUR *LAST.*

AS FOR THE *EARTH*... ITS TIME *TOO* WILL COME.

IN BUT A SHORT TIME, ANNIHILUS SHALL *RETURN*...

...AND NO MAN WILL DARE STAND *AGAINST HIM!*

NEXT ISSUE: THE *END* OF THE *FANTASTIC FOUR!*

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ CC | 141 DEC 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR

ROMITA

BEN-- STOP! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!

ALL I KNOW, RICHARDS, IS THAT YOU TRIED TO KILL YOUR OWN SON!!

IT'S TOO LATE, BEN-- TOO LATE FOR ALL OF US!!

LITTLE FRANKLIN IS GLOWING-- LIKE AN ATOMIC BOMB!

IS THIS-- THE END OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR?

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!™

HERE IT IS: THE STORY YOU NEVER DREAMED YOU'D SEE!

THE END OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

REED RICHARDS, JOHNNY STORM... THE VAST AND POWERFUL *THING!* ALL, ALL OF THEM...*MY PRISONERS!*

WHAT POWER IN THE *UNIVERSE* CAN STOP ME NOW? WHO DARES STAND AGAINST *ANNIHILUS?*

ANNIHILUS IS SUPREME!

*IF YOU DIDN'T READ OUR LAST ISSUE, YOU'VE A **LOT** OF CATCHING UP TO DO... SO WHY DON'T YOU SIT BACK AND LET **THESE** GENTLEMEN FILL YOU IN AS QUICKLY AS **POSSIBLE?** THEY ARE:*

*ENOUGH. **AHEAD:***

GERRY CONWAY SCRIPTER / *JOHN BUSCEMA* ARTIST / *JOE SINNOTT* EMBELLISHER / JOHN COSTANZA, letterer G. ROUSSOS, colorist / *ROY THOMAS,* EDITOR

HERE IN THE *NEGATIVE ZONE* ALL CREATURES *FEAR* ME... AND SUCH IS AS IT *SHOULD* BE.

BUT... IN THE DIMENSIONS *BEYOND* THIS NIGHTMARE LAND, DIMENSIONS WHICH HOLD SUCH PLANETS AS THE *EARTH* FROM WHICH MY CAPTIVES HAVE *COME*...

...THERE I AM ONLY A *GIANT*... SUPERIOR TO *MOST*, BUT NOT *ALL*.

SOON, HOWEVER, THAT SITUATION WILL *CHANGE*.

SOON I WILL HAVE THE *POWER*... THE *GLORY* FOR WHICH I WAS *BORN*.

AND TO THINK MY NEW POSITION WILL BE DUE TO THE ACCURSED *REED RICHARDS*...

ALMOST, THE *IRONY* IS TOO GREAT TO *BEAR!*

*THEN, AS THE CREATURE CALLED ANNIHILUS **GLOATS** OVER HIS ILL-WON VICTORY, A SECTION OF THE PLANETOID BELOW HIM **OPENS**, LIGHT FLOODS OUT INTO THE STARK, MIDNIGHT SKY... AND STRANGE **BEAMS** COME INTO PLAY UPON THE DRIFTING FIVESOME...*

GENTLY, MY LOVELESS ONES. FLOAT GENTLY TO YOUR *REST*.

IN A SHORT TIME, WE MUST *TALK*...

... AND YOU MUST BE *READY* TO SUIT MY *PLEASURE!*

*AND, SO A SHORT TIME **LATER**, IN A ROOM SCENTED WITH A STRANGE AND **UNEARTHLY** AIR...*

WHAT *HIT* ME--A *BULLDOZER?*

WHERE ARE WE, JOHNNY? THIS ISN'T REED'S *LAB!*

I'VE GOT KINKS IN MY *KINKS!*

YA *NOTICED* THAT, DIDYA, MEDUSA?

LAST THING I *REMEMBER*, WE WUZ BEATIN' ON THAT CREEP *ANNIHILUS!*

I HATE TO TELL YOU THIS, MR. GRIMM... WE *LOST.*

QUIET, ALL OF YOU. DON'T YOU REALIZE WHERE WE *ARE?*

WE'RE IN THE *NEGATIVE ZONE*-- AND IN FRONT OF US--

--THE MASTER OF YOUR FUTURE *LIVES.*

YOU SEEMED HARDLY PLEASED TO *SEE* ME, REED RICHARDS.

CAN IT BE YOU DON'T *WELCOME* THIS REUNION?

PERHAPS IF YOU GLANCED IN THE *STASIS CYLINDER* BEHIND ME--

-- YOU MIGHT BECOME MORE-- *AMIABLE.*

SUE--AND MY SON, FRANKLIN!

IF YOU'VE HARMED THEM, I SWEAR I'LL--

AH, BUT YOU'VE MISSED THEIR COMPANION, REED RICHARDS. OR DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE YOUR CHILD'S FORMER GOVERNESS...

AGATHA HARKNESS... WHOSE AID HAS MADE THIS EVENING POSSIBLE.

NO NEED TO BECOME VITUPERATIVE, MY FRIEND...

I ASSURE YOU, I HAVEN'T HARMED YOUR WIFE OR YOUR PRECIOUS CHILD... YET.

I HAVE BEEN AWAITING YOUR PRESENCE BEFORE BEGINNING.

MADMAN! IF YOU TOUCH THEM-- IF YOU GO NEAR THEM--

--I'LL KILL YOU WITH MY BARE HANDS!

NO, REED--STOP! THIS ISN'T THE WAY!

YOU'RE PLAYING RIGHT INTO HIS HANDS!

LISTEN TO RED, STRETCHO!

WE GOTTA FIND OUT THE SCORE BEFORE WE START KNOCKIN' AROUND LIKE A BUNCHA YANCY STREETERS!

YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE... I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER.

IT'S JUST THAT... ALL THESE MONTHS, BEING SEPARATED FROM SUE... AND NOW TO FIND HER LIKE THIS...!

A PITY THE ARRANGEMENTS AREN'T MORE ROMANTIC.

STILL ... YOU MUST LEARN TO ACCEPT THINGS AS THEY ARE, NOT AS YOU WISH THEM TO BE.

GET TA THE POINT, CREEP.

AH, THE *POINT.* PERHAPS I SHOULD REFRESH YOUR *MEMORY,* BENJAMIN GRIMM. SEVERAL YEARS AGO, YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS... EXCEPT FOR THE YOUTH NAMED WYATT WINGFOOT AND THE MYSTERIOUS WOMAN NAMED *MEDUSA*... WERE INVOLVED IN AN ABORTED ATTEMPT AT A *MOON-SHOT*...

A FLIGHT THAT ENDED IN *DISASTER* WHEN COSMIC RAYS CAUSED YOU TO LOSE CONTROL AND *CRASH.*

THOSE *SAME* RAYS CHANGED YOU, ALL *FOUR* OF YOU... INTO THE CREATURES YOU NOW *ARE*...

EACH OF YOU BECAME *UNIQUE,* A FREAK... A SUPER-POWERED *BEING.* STILL YOUR EXISTENCE WOULD HAVE REMAINED OF INTEREST ONLY TO YOUR *EARTH*...

"THEN RICHARDS MARRIED *SUSAN STORM*...

"...AND SUE RICHARDS BECAME *PREGNANT.* IN AN EFFORT TO SAVE HER FROM COMPLICATIONS RESULTING FROM HER PREVIOUS EXPOSURE TO *COSMIC RAYS,* YOU CAME TO *MY* KINGDOM...

"...YOU *BATTLED* ME*...

*FF ANNUAL #6, --ROY.

"--AND EVENTUALLY YOU *TRICKED* ME INTO GIVING YOU POWER FROM MY *COSMIC CONTROL ROD,* WHICH PROVIDED ME WITH *ETERNAL LIFE*--

"--AND WHICH, BECAUSE OF YOUR TAMPERING, DOES SO *NO LONGER.*

"USING THE UNCANNY ELEMENTS *PRESENT* IN THE COSMIC CONTROL ROD, YOU SAVED YOUR WIFE'S *LIFE*... AND THE LIFE OF YOUR *SON*...

"...BUT, FOR THE PAST MONTHS YOU'VE *WORRIED*... AND *WONDERED*... JUST HOW *MUCH* YOUR SON WAS AFFECTED BY THE COSMIC-RAY-CHARGED GENES OF HIS *PARENTS*--

"-- AND WHETHER HE'D BECOME A *PRODIGY*...

"...OR A NIGHTMARE-PRODUCING *MONSTER.*"

YOU SHOULD BE HAPPY TO *KNOW,* REED RICHARDS, THAT I CAN NOW *ANSWER* THAT PITIABLE QUESTION...

FRANKLIN RICHARDS IS *INDEED* A MONSTER--IN THE *FULLEST* SENSE OF THE WORD!

THAT'S MY *SON* YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT--

--THAT'S MY *SON!*

BE *CAREFUL,* RICHARDS--BEFORE YOU DO SOMETHING YOU *REGRET*--

--AND I MUST PUNISH YOU: *SO!*

:UNNNNHH!:

BRAKK!

HAVE NO *FEAR,* MEDUSA... REED RICHARDS IS NOT *HARMED,* ONLY *STUNNED.*

...AND IN A SHORT WHILE, THAT LOSS WILL LAST *FOREVER!*

FOR A *TIME,* HOWEVER, HE WILL FIND IT *IMPOSSIBLE* TO USE HIS UNIQUE POWERS...

MISTER, IN ABOUT *TEN SECONDS--!*

JOHNNY, *NO.* IT'S *USELESS* TO FIGHT HIM NOW!

THAT'S WHAT *YOU* SAY, RED.

YOUR RED-TRESSED COMPANION'S ADVICE IS *EXCELLENT,* THING. YOU SHOULD *TAKE* IT.

SORRY, BUSTER. MEDUSA'S *NEW* TO THE GROUP...

SHE AIN'T LEARNED TO TAKE THINGS *PERSONAL,* YET.

BUT, PAL, WHEN YOU HURT ONE'A *US*-- YA HURT *ME*--

BA-KOW!

--AND MISTER-- THAT MAKES ME *MAD!*

:EEEEEEEYOW!: MY *HAND*-- SOME SORTA FREAKY *ARMOR--!*

YES, BLUNDERING ONE... ***ARMOR***, OF A KIND YOUR EARTH-BORN EYES HAVE NEVER ***SEEN!***

ARMOR FORGED FROM A MATTER / ANTI-MATTER ***ALLOY.***

THE STRONGEST SECOND SKIN IN ALL THE KNOWN ***UNIVERSES!***

CHOOM!

ANNIHILUS IS STRONGER THAN ***ALL!***

THAT ***DOES*** IT, INSECT-FACE! MEDUSA SAYS WE SHOULD ***WAIT***--

--BUT I'VE HAD IT TO ***HERE*** WITH WATCHING YOU WALK OVER US LIKE WE WERE ***DOORMATS!***

FLAME ON!

YOU LITTLE ***FOOL.*** DO YOU IMAGINE I'D ALLOW YOU TO ***AWAKEN*** HERE UNRESTRAINED-- IF I HAD ANY ***FEAR*** OF YOUR PETTY ***POWERS?***

THIS IS ***MY*** LAND, AND ***MY*** KINGDOM-- AND HERE, ***ANNIHILUS*** IS SUPREME!

YOUR FLAME IS A ***MOCKERY*** OF ***POWER!***

YOU ***SEE,*** JOHNNY STORM? NO MERE ***HEAT BLAST*** CAN HARM ME-- FOR I HAVE EXPLORED THE HEARTS OF BLAZING ***SUNS***--

--I HAVE WALKED WHERE THE MINDS OF MEN WOULD BE ***MADDENED!***

YEAH? I'M ***IMPRESSED,*** BEETLE-BROWS. BUT LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I ***REALLY*** TURN ON THE JUICE--

LET'S SEE HOW YOU DO AGAINST A ***NOVA BLAST!***

JOHNNY--? ***JOHNNY!*** IN THE NAME OF ***HEAVEN***-- YOU ***MUSTN'T!***

THE DRAIN ON YOUR ***LIFE ENERGY*** --IT'LL ***DESTROY YOU!***

REED, IT'S ***TOO LATE!*** HE'S ALREADY ***BEGUN!***

BUT, BEFORE THE BLINDING GLARE OF THE NOVA BLAST CAN REACH **PEAK** INTENSITY--

THIS CHARADE HAS GONE ON **LONG ENOUGH.** IT **TIRES** ME.

NOW-- WE MUST ATTEND TO MORE **IMPORTANT** MATTERS!

FOOM!

NO!

SON, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? CAN YOU MOVE?

JUST-JUST GIVE ME A **SECOND,** REED. I'LL SHOW THAT--**CREEP** WHAT HAPPENS-- WHEN HE TACKLES-- THE HUMAN **TORCH--!**

TAKE IT **EASY,** JOHNNY.

FOR SEVERAL SECONDS, THE MAN CALLED **MR. FANTASTIC** IS SILENT. THEN--

YOU BROUGHT US HERE FOR A **REASON,** ANNIHILUS.

REVENGE WAS PART OF IT-- BUT SO IS MY **SON.** WHAT IS IT YOU **WANT** WITH HIM?

IN MY OWN GOOD **TIME,** EARTHLING.

FOR NOW, YOU MUST **LISTEN...** AND LEARN HOW I CAME TO ENLIST **AGATHA HARKNESS.**

...SHE WHO WAS ONCE YOUR MOST TRUSTED **FRIEND.**

SHORTLY AFTER MY LAST **CONTACT*** WITH YOUR WORLD, I WAS STUDYING YOUR WIFE AND **CHILD--**

*TEAM-UP #2. --RT.

"--AND IT WAS **THEN** THAT MY INTER-SPACIAL MONITORS FIRST PICKED UP THE VERY **SPECIAL** VIBRATIONS OF MISS HARKNESS--!

THE WOMAN **EXUDES** PSYCHIC ENERGY-- AND SHE HAS AN **AFFINITY** FOR THE CHILD.

YES... **SHE** WILL SUIT MY PLANS **PERFECTLY.**

"PERHAPS SHE **SUSPECTED** SOMETHING WAS AMISS, FOR SHE SENT THE BOY **AWAY** SOON AFTER...

"I CONSUMED A GREAT DEAL OF **POWER** IN OPENING A PORTAL BETWEEN YOUR SPACE AND THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**-- BUT ONCE IT WAS OPEN, THERE WAS LITTLE **DIFFICULTY** IN TRANSPORTING AGATHA HARKNESS **HERE.**

I BELIEVE SHE ATTEMPTED TO *REACH* YOU IN THE INSTANT BEFORE HER TRANSPORTATION.*

AND YOU FORCED HER TO KIDNAP *SUE?*

I'M JUST *BEGINNING* TO UNDERSTAND HOW *RUTHLESS* YOU ARE, ANNIHILUS.

NATURALLY, THE ENERGIES *RELEASED* BY THE PROCESS *DESTROYED* HER PETTY LITTLE *HOME.*

WHAT HAPPENS *NOW?*

NOW? WHY... THAT SHOULD BE *OBVIOUS.*

*FF #135. --RT.

IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO *REST*-- SO YOU WILL BE *REFRESHED* WHEN WE BEGIN-- *THE TRANS-FORMATION!*

HEY! WHAT'S THE BIG *IDEA?*

WE'RE BEING *BOUND*-- BY SOME SORT OF *MACHINE!*

THEY SEEM LIKE *TENTACLES*--MADE OUT OF *STEEL!*

STRONGER THAN STEEL, WYATT! THEY'RE *UNBREAKABLE!*

UNBREAK-ABLE, HUH?

STRETCHO, THE STEEL AIN'T BEEN *BUILT* WHICH CAN HOLD THE *THING!*

ALL I GOTTA DO IS FLEX THE OLD *BICEPS,* AND--

URRRRRK!

YOU CAN'T DISMISS US *THIS* EASILY, ANNIHILUS!

I SWEAR TO YOU, THIS BATTLE ISN'T *OVER*--

IT'S ONLY *BEGUN*NNNNNNN.

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

LET'S TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO JUMP WORLDS AWAY, FOR A LOOK INTO THE LIFE OF ALICIA MASTERS, ON A JET SOMEWHERE OVER EUROPE...

IF ONLY BEN WERE HERE... I NEED HIM BESIDE ME, MORE THAN EVER.

IT'S AS THOUGH SOMETHING WERE KEEPING US APART...

...NOW, OF ALL TIMES!

PERHAPS HE DOESN'T WANT TO SEE ME...PERHAPS HE'S DELIBERATELY BEEN AWAY WHEN I CALLED.*

NO. THAT'S SILLY. BEN LOVES ME...

...EVEN IF I AM BLIND.

*FF #138. --RT.

SOON THAT WON'T MATTER ANYMORE. THERE'LL BE NOTHING BETWEEN US... NOTHING TO KEEP US FROM BEING MARRIED.

MAYBE I'M GETTING MY HOPES UP... BUT I DON'T CARE.

ALL I CAN THINK IS... I'LL BE ABLE TO SEE LIKE ANYONE ELSE. SOON I'LL BE ABLE TO SEE!

THERE SHE IS NOW...JUST AS THE MASTER DESCRIBED HER.

HERE, MISS. LET ME HELP YOU.

THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY, YOUNG MAN. MY ASSISTANCE IS ALL THE DEAR LADY NEEDS.

WHO'S THERE? I DON'T--?

ARE YOU EXPECTING ANYONE, MISS? IF NOT--

MISS MASTERS, I AM DOCTOR HANS STUTGART. WE CORRESPONDED, YOU AND I.

IF YOU WILL COME WITH ME, I HAVE A LIMOUSINE WAITING.

THE HOSPITAL IS A HALF-HOUR'S DRIVE AWAY. WE SHOULD LEAVE AT ONCE.

IT'S NOT GOOD TO BE OUT AFTER DARK IN THESE ENVIRONS, YOU SEE...

...THERE ARE *LEGENDS* ABOUT THE SURROUNDING HILLS.

VERY *UNPLEASANT* LEGENDS INDEED.

YOU DON'T SOUND AT ALL LIKE WHAT I EXPECTED FROM YOUR *LETTERS*, DOCTOR.

BUT THEN... PEOPLE RARELY *DO*.

WHAM!

NUTS!

I'M GOIN' *STIR* CRAZY-- AN' *YOU* SAY WE GOTTA KEEP *CALM*.

WHY DON'T YA JUST *ADMIT* IT, REED? WE'RE *BEAT!*

LOOKS LIKE HE'S *RIGHT*, BROTHER-IN-LAW. ANNIHILUS WEAKENED *ALL* OF US WITH THAT RAY-BLAST OF HIS.

THERE'S NO *WAY* WE CAN GET OUT OF THIS *TOWER*.

PERHAPS THERE *IS* A WAY, JOHNNY STORM.

HOW, MEDUSA? WE'RE *DRAINED*... ALL OF US.

YOU MEAN *ALMOST* ALL OF US, DON'T YOU, REED?

OR NEED I REMIND YOU OF YOUR *OWN* EARTH-LEGEND?

THE LEGEND OF *RAPUNZEL*?

AND SO, SHORT MOMENTS LATER...

THIS IS *MORTIFYIN'*

IF THE GANG ON *YANCY STREET* EVER FINDS OUT I PLAYED PRINCE IN A *FAIRY TALE*--

I'LL NEVER LIVE IT *DOWN!*

WITHIN' MINUTES THE QUINTET IS REUNITED UNDER A STRANGE AND ALIEN SKY... AND THEN...

WE'D BETTER GET AS FAR FROM ANNIHILUS' STRONGHOLD AS *POSSIBLE*.

THERE'LL BE TIME FOR ATTACK *LATER*... BUT RIGHT NOW, WE'VE GOT TO TRY AND STAY *ALIVE*.

ALIVE... AND *FREE*.

HIGH POCKETS, THAT'S ENUFF FOR *ME*.

NIGHT IS A CONSTANT ON THIS BARREN PLANETOID... AND SO, IT IS STILL NIGHT WHEN WE REJOIN OUR HEROES A FEW HOURS LATER...

IF WE'D HAD BRAVES LIKE YOU TO HELP US, JOHNNY-- THE INDIANS MIGHT NEVER HAVE LOST THE WEST.

CUT IT OUT, WYATT. YOU'LL GIVE ME A SWELLED HEAD.

YA ALREADY HAVE A SWELLED HEAD, TORCHIE.

THAT'S WHAT MAKES YA SO CUTE!

PLEASE, BEN... I'M TRYING TO THINK.

IF WHAT I SUSPECT IS TRUE... WE'RE ALL IN A GREAT DEAL OF DANGER.

IT'S SOMETHING I'VE FEARED EVER SINCE FRANKLIN WAS BORN-- THAT IN SOME WAY, THE POWER FROM ANNIHILUS' CONTROL ROD MIGHT HAVE HARMED HIM.

KRACK!

I WAS EXPERIMENTING TO FIND AN ANSWER WHEN--

THE SOUND! WHAT--?

IEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

THOSE CREATURES-- THEY MUST BE THE INHABITANTS OF THIS PLANET!

BENJY, WATCH OUT!

CALL 'EM WHAT YA WANT, STRETCH--THEY DON'T LOOK HAPPY TO SEE US!

THE LEADER IS HEADED STRAIGHT FOR YOU!

KA-POW!!

THAT SUITS ME FINE, WYATT. I'VE BEEN ITCHIN' FOR A FIGHT--

AND BOZO HERE JUST WON THE PRIZE!

ARRHHH

DON'T KNOW HOW LONG MY FLAME WILL LAST-- BUT I HAVEN'T ANY CHOICE!

FLAME ON!

HEY! THIS IS BETTER'N I *THOUGHT.* YOU JOKERS MAY *LOOK* LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A FIFTIES *HORROR FLICK..*

--BUT YA GOT YERSELVES AS MUCH *SPUNK* AS FULL-GROWN *YANCY STREETERS!*

KRAK!

HOLD ON A SECOND, REED--I'LL TAKE CARE OF THAT NIGHT GALLERY *REFUGEE.*

WAP!

GOOD WORK, SON--MY *ELASTIC* POWERS HAVEN'T FULLY *COME BACK* YET.

I COULD BARELY KEEP AWAY FROM ITS *TEETH!*

YA *KNOW* SUMTHIN', MATCH-HEAD? NEXT TA *HEE HAW,* THIS IS THE *MOST* FUN I'VE HAD IN *MONTHS.*

LISTEN TA THAT, WILLYA? IT'S *MEEEYOUSIC!*

CLUNK!

YOU'RE NOT FOOLING *ANYONE,* YOU BIG LUMP.

YOU'RE JUST GLAD TO BE DOING SOMETHING-- *ANYTHING*-- TO TAKE YOUR MIND OFF FRANKLIN AND *SUE!*

UH-OH! REED'S *SIGNALING* US!

LOOKS LIKE WE'VE *WON!*

A FEW MINUTES LATER, AFTER REED HAS CONFERRED WITH THE ALIEN CAPTIVES...

THEY SEEM TO BE *TELEPATHIC,* BEN... IT'S *AMAZING.*

SO'S THE FALL TV *LINEUP,* STRETCH.

WHAT DID HE *TELL* YA, ANYWAY?

HE CONFIRMED MY *SUSPICIONS,* OLD FRIEND...

APPARENTLY ANNIHILUS HAS BEEN LOSING *ENERGY* THESE PAST MONTHS SINCE WE FIRST CAME HERE...

BUT WE'RE GETTIN' OUR STRENGTH *BACK,* REED.

HOW D'YA EXPLAIN *THAT?*

IT CAN MEAN ONLY *ONE THING,* BEN. HE'S *DONE* WITH US...

NOW HE'LL BEGIN ON *FRANKLIN!*

AT THAT PRECISE INSTANT, IN THE CRAGGY FORTRESS OF THE CREATURE CALLED ANNIHILUS...

MISS HARKNESS, WE HAVE TO STOP HIM!

ISN'T THERE SOMETHING YOU CAN DO? SOME SPELL?

I AM AS HELPLESS AS YOU ARE, SUSAN...

HERE IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE, MY POWERS ARE HALVED.

WE CAN DO NOTHING BUT WAIT... AND PRAY.

BUT WHAT ABOUT FRANKLIN?

HE'LL BE KILLED!

ON THE CONTRARY, SUSAN RICHARDS... HE WILL BE FREED FROM THE BONDS OF HIS HUMANITY!

WITHIN YOUR SON'S CHILDLIKE FORM THERE EXISTS AN UNTAPPED ENERGY-- AN ENERGY RELEASED BY THE RAYS OF MY GENE TRANSMUTER!

NOW THAT ENERGY FLOWS FROM HIM TO ME-- FILLING ME-- RETURNING TO ME THE POWER I LOST SO MANY MONTHS AGO!

SOON NOW, MY PERSONAL POWER WILL BE GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE--

--AND I WILL CONQUER-- AS IS MY DESTINY!

BUT, EVEN AS ANNIHILUS **GLOATS** OVER HIS IMAGINED VICTORY, FORCES ARE AT WORK WHICH WILL **STEAL** HIS HOPED-FOR GLORY...

...FORCES WHICH EXIST IN A MOST **UNLIKELY** RECEPTACLE, BUT WHICH **DO** EXIST, NONETHELESS.

NOW IT BEGINS...AND FOR THOSE WHOSE LIVES ARE **TOUCHED** BY FRANKLIN RICHARDS...

...THIS DAY CAN ONLY END... IN **TRAGEDY.**

MEANWHILE, TWO MILES **SOUTH**...

OKAY, TORCHIE-- JUST DO THE **JOB.**

YA DON'T HAVE TA GET ALL **DRAMATIC** ABOUT IT.

THIS RIDGE LEADS RIGHT UP TO HIS **STRONG-HOLD,** MR. RICHARDS.

YOUR PLAN **SHOULD** WORK, AFTER ALL.

PERHAPS **SO,** WYATT. I WISH MEDUSA **AGREED.**

SUPPOSE THE TUNNEL COMES **DOWN** ON YOU? WHAT GOOD WILL YOU BE TO YOUR WIFE AND CHILD **THEN,** REED RICHARDS?

IT'S **INSANITY.** I'LL HAVE NOTHING TO **DO** WITH IT.

SUIT **YERSELF,** RED. ME, I DON'T SEE HOW WE'VE GOT A **CHOICE.**

AS STRETCH POINTED OUT, IF WE GO WALTZIN' UP TA THE **FRONT DOOR**-- WE'VE HAD IT BEFORE WE **STARTED.**

THIS WAY--AT LEAST WE'VE GOT A **CHANCE.** AND LADY--

--THAT'S ALL I EVER **ASK.**

FOR SEVERAL SECONDS THE CRIMSON-TRESSED INHUMAN REMAINS STUBBORNLY **MOTIONLESS,** AS THOUGH REVIEWING IN HER MIND HER LOYALTIES-- AND **INTERESTS.**

THEN, WITH A SIGH, SHE STEPS **FORWARD**-- AND THE LONG TREK **CONTINUES.**

MOMENTS BECOME **MINUTES**, AND STILL THE HEROES MOVE FORWARD WITH GRIM **DETERMINATION**... EACH THINKING THEIR PRIVATE THOUGHTS, EACH LOST IN THEIR MOST **PERSONAL** CONCERNS...

THEY WALK FOR WHAT SEEMS AN **ETERNITY**, AND THEN...

REED! I CAN **FEEL** SOMETHING AHEAD OF ME--THE VIBRATIONS OF **MACHINERY!** WE'RE ALMOST **THERE!** WE'RE ALMOST--

...**THERE!**

AND WILL YOU LOOK WHO'S HERE TO **GREET** US!

MANDIBLE-JAWS **HIMSELF!**

YOU! YOU HAVE DARED RETURN **HERE?** TO FACE **ME?**

LITTLE **FOOL**... I'D THOUGHT MYSELF WELL **RID** OF YOU AND YOUR TIRESOME **TEAM-MATES**...

FOOOSH!

...BUT IT APPEARS THAT HOPE WAS IN **VAIN!** NO MATTER... WITH THE POWER NOW MINE TO COMMAND, YOU POSE HARDLY NO THREAT AT **ALL!**

JUST ONE **BLAST** FROM MY **COSMIC CONTROL ROD**, AND--EH?

SURPRISED, BRIGHT EYES? YOU AREN'T THE **ONLY** FELLA AROUND HERE WITH **TRICKS** UP HIS SLEEVE.

ZAK! ZAK! ZAK!

IT'S OCCURED TO ME I CAN'T REALLY **FIGHT** YOU--

BUT, BUSTER, I CAN DODGE THE **HECK** OUT OF THOSE CRUMMY **JOKE-BOLTS!**

ENRAGED BY THE TORCH'S MOCKING TONE, ANNIHILUS **CONTINUES** TO BLAST FUTILELY AT THE YOUTH'S BLAZING FORM-- NOT **NOTICING** THE ARM MOVING UP BEHIND HIM UNTIL--

SWAK!

UNNNNH!

WE'VE CHANGED OUR **TACTICS,** ANNIHILUS, WE REALIZED HOW **FOOLISH** IT WAS TO CONFRONT YOU DIRECTLY--

--SO NOW WE'RE USING **SUBTERFUGE.**

SPEAK FER **YER-SELF,** SHORTY. I'M KINDA PARTIAL TO THE **PERSONAL** TOUCH.

AN' RIGHT **NOW**--

IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!

GRUMP!

SMASH!

IT'S NO **USE,** MY DEAR GIRL. HE CAN'T **HEAR** YOU.

BUT WE **MUST** REACH HIM! WE HAVE TO TELL HIM ABOUT **FRANKLIN!**

WHATEVER COMMUNI-CATION DEVICE ANNIHILUS WAS USING BEFORE IS **OFF** NOW!

PERHAPS-- PERHAPS THERE **IS** A WAY, IF MY POWERS HAVE NOT BEEN WEAKENED **TOO** GREATLY!

TRY, MISS HARK-NESS! PLEASE, PLEASE **TRY!**

REED RICHARDS... REED RICHARDS, YOU MUST **LISTEN** TO ME.

YOUR SON IS IN **DANGER...** DANGER... DANGER

FRANKLIN? GOOD LORD IN **HEAVEN...**

THE WAY HE'S **SITTING** THERE...STARING INTO **SPACE!** IT **CAN'T** HAVE HAPPENED--NOT TO MY **SON!**

HIS EYES... GLOWING WITH SOME INTERNAL POWER.

HE DOESN'T SEE ME. HE ISN'T EVEN AWARE OF MY PRESENCE!

WAIT-- I CAN ALMOST FEEL HIS THOUGHTS-- IT'S AS THOUGH THE POWER OF HIS MIND WAS REACHING ACROSS THE VOID-- INTO MY BRAIN!

GALAXIES... ENDLESS STARS... THE UNIVERSE SPREAD AT HIS FEET.

THEY'RE LIKE TOYS TO HIM... A CHILD'S TOYS!

THE LAST TIME WE TANGLED, YA HAD US OFF-GUARD.

NOW IT'S OUR TURN TA KEEP YOU ON YER TOES, BAT-BOY. WE AIN'T GONNA GIVE YA A CHANCE TA BREATHE--

WHOMP!

THAT'S IT, BEN GRIMM-- PUSH HIM TOWARD ME, SO THAT I CAN DO--

--AN' EVEN A GUY WITH ALL THE POWER IN THE WORLD HAS GOTTA GET HIMSELF BALANCED BEFORE HE CAN USE IT!

--THIS!

NO! THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING-- IT CAN'T!

SWAK!

ALL THE POWER-- IN THE UNIVERSE-- WAS MINE--MINE--

I CAN'T HAVE BEEN DEFEATED-- NOT BY YOU--

NOT BY YOUUUUUU--

WHAT HAPPENED TA HIM? A MOMENT AGO HE WAS PLAYIN' GOD.

NOW HE CAN'T EVEN SIT UP STRAIGHT!

BEN, JOHNNY... WE DON'T HAVE ANY TIME TO *WASTE.*

THAT'S FER *ME,* STRETCHO.

HEY-- WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE *KID?*

FREE SUE AND MISS HARKNESS *QUICKLY*... WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE AT *ONCE!*

IT'S THE *COSMIC RAYS* ANNIHILUS USED ON HIM--THEY'VE AFFECTED HIS ENTIRE GENETIC *STRUCTURE.*

IN THE NAME OF HEAVEN...*HURRY,* JOHNNY! *HURRY!*

MISS HARKNESS...THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH *FRANKLIN,* ISN'T THERE? *ISN'T* THERE?

WE MUST WAIT AND *SEE,* SUSAN.

SSSSS

SSSSS

SUE, TAKE *CARE* OF FRANKLIN. THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO FOR HIM *HERE.*

MISS HARKNESS, I KNOW YOU HAVE *POWERS*--ABILITIES UNLIKE OUR *OWN.* CAN YOU SEND US BACK TO THE *BAXTER BUILDING*-- IN OUR OWN WORLD!

I CAN TRY, REED RICHARDS... THOUGH MY POWERS *HAVE* BEEN WEAKENED.

STILL... I *CAN* TRY.

BY WIND AND STORM, BY RAIN AND FEAR TAKE THESE FIVE AWAY FROM HERE...

"...AND LET THEIR SOULS BE CALM AND CLEAR BY WIND... AND STORM... AND RAIN... AND FEAR."

REED--WHAT'S *HAPPENING* TO FRANKLIN? HIS EYES-- THE WAY THEY'RE *GLOWING!*

WELL WHADDAYA *KNOW.* WE'RE *BACK--*

IN TIME FOR *ALL IN THE FAMILY* TOO.

LORD HELP US *ALL!* HIS ENERGIES ARE BUILDING TO *CRITICAL MASS!*

IF THEY CONTINUE TO BUILD, HE'LL LET LOOSE A BLAST OF PSYCHIC FORCE--

--A BLAST STRONG ENOUGH TO KILL EVERY LIVING CREATURE IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM!

MEDUSA... WHAT WILL WE DO? MY FRANKLIN...

REED WILL THINK OF SOMETHING, SUSAN.

TRUST HIM.

I DO TRUST HIM--BUT I'M SO AFRAID!

THIS IS ONLY MY EXPERIMENTAL MODEL--AND A DEFECTIVE ONE AT THAT.*

STILL--IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE. I HAVE TO USE IT--NO MATTER WHAT THE CONSEQUENCES!

*REED DEVELOPED THIS ANTI-MATTER WEAPON LAST ISSUE. -- RT.

MEDUSA... LOOK AT HIM! HIS EYES ARE GLOWING BRIGHTER...

DON'T WORRY, SUE--HERE COMES REED NOW.

HE HAS SOMETHING WITH HIM!

WAIT--WHAT IS HE DOING? THAT LOOKS LIKE SOME SORT OF GUN! NO--REED, NO!

NOOOOOO

SSLAK!

AND SLOWLY, THE ALIEN GLOW DIES...

...BUT WITH IT DIES THE LIGHT OF INTELLIGENCE, TO BE REPLACED BY...

...DARKNESS.

I HAD TO **DO** IT, SUE. HE WAS BECOMING TOO **POWERFUL**...

I WISH THERE'D BEEN ANOTHER **WAY.**

WHAT-WHAT'S **HAPPENED** TO HIM? WHAT HAVE YOU **DONE** TO HIM, REED?

HIS MIND... I'VE SHUT DOWN HIS **MIND.**

THEN YOU'VE TURNED HIM INTO A **VEGETABLE.** YOUR OWN **SON...!**

DON'T YOU **SEE,** SUE? HE WAS TOO **POWERFUL**... IF HIS ENERGY HAD CONTINUED TO BUILD, HE'D HAVE DESTROYED THE **WORLD!**

BUT HE WAS YOUR **SON,** REED, IF YOU'VE NEVER LOVED **ME**... YOU SHOULD HAVE LOVED **HIM.**

FRANKLIN WAS YOUR **SON.**

DO YOU THINK I **WANTED** TO DO IT?

I HAD NO **CHOICE** ... THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD **DO!**

LOOKS LIKE **WE** AIN'T GOT A CHOICE **EITHER,** RICHARDS.

'CAUSE AFTER WHAT **YOU** JUST DID, THERE CAN'T **BE** A TEAM ANYMORE. THIS IS THE **END,** MISTER...

THE **END** OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR!**

NEXT ISSUE: NEW ARTIST! NEW STORY-LINE! BUT STILL THE SAME OLD **ACTION**-- AS WE DISCOVER--

THE **DEATH DEMON!**

FINIS?

Cover to 1973's *The Fantastic Four Annual* #10
(reprinting *The Fantastic Four Annual* #3-4)

The Fantastic Four #130 production proof displaying the original unrevised cover art by Jim Steranko & Joe Sinnott

WORLD COLOR

FANTASTIC FOUR

MARVEL COMICS GROUP™

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ CC | 130 JAN 02462

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIX MAGAZINE!

FANTASTIC FOUR®

STERANKO SINNOTT

BATTLEGROUND: THE BAXTER BUILDING!

YELLOW T

BLUE T

The Fantastic Four #131 production proof displaying the original unrevised cover art by Jim Steranko & Joe Sinnott

The Fantastic Four #130, page 16 original art
by John Buscema & Joe Sinnott

WHAT.? BUT THAT'S--IMPOSSIBLE! I COULDN'T HAVE CALCULATED SO ERRONEOUSLY!
STILL, NO MATTER. THIS CYCLO-RAY OF RICHARDS' WILL TURN HIM TO ATOMS BEFORE HE CAN FREE HIMSELF!
GO, WIZARD-- GO!!
CRUDELY PUT, BUT STILL--
WHAT?? LET GO OF ME!!
NO!!
I HAVE SAID THERE WILL BE NO KILLING OF MEN OR CHILDREN--
--AND THUNDRA'S WORD IS THUNDRA'S BOND!
PHRAK!
NOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND, AT LAST?
IF THE THING BREAKS FREE, THEN I SHALL HANDLE HIM-- AND I ALONE!
BREAK--!? LADY, THAT PASTE OF MINE IS GOOD AND HARD BY NOW.
NOTHING'S GONNA BUST OUT OF IT. NOTHING!
MISTER, THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE WRONG!
AN' IT'S HIGH TIME I SHOWED YOU JUST HOW DEAD WRONG YOU ARE!
IN FACT--THE TIME-- IT REALLY IS--
--IS GLOBBERIN' TIME!
CONAN THE BARBARIAN! THE FIRST—AND STILL THE BEST!

Courtesy Heritage Auctions

The Fantastic Four #141, page 20 original art
by John Buscema & Joe Sinnott

FANTASTIC FOUR
141
32
I HAD TO DO IT, SUE. HE WAS BECOMING TOO POWERFUL...
I WISH THERE'D BEEN ANOTHER WAY.
WHAT-WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HIM, REED?
HIS MIND... I'VE SHUT DOWN HIS MIND.
THEN YOU'VE TURNED HIM INTO A VEGETABLE. YOUR OWN SON...!
DON'T YOU SEE, SUE? HE WAS TOO POWERFUL... IF HIS ENERGY HAD CONTINUED TO BUILD, HE'D HAVE DESTROYED THE WORLD!
BUT HE WAS YOUR SON, REED, IF YOU'VE NEVER LOVED ME... YOU SHOULD HAVE LOVED HIM.
FRANKLIN WAS YOUR SON.
DO YOU THINK I WANTED TO DO IT?
LOOKS LIKE WE AIN'T GOT A CHOICE EITHER, RICHARDS.
I HAD NO CHOICE ... THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO!
'CAUSE AFTER WHAT YOU JUST DID, THERE CAN'T BE A TEAM ANYMORE, THIS IS THE END, MISTER...
THE END OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
NEXT ISSUE: NEW ARTIST! NEW STORY-LINE! BUT STILL THE SAME OLD ACTION -- AS WE DISCOVER --
THE DEATH DEMON!
FINIS?
32

Courtesy Heritage Auctions

BIOGRAPHIES

ROY THOMAS

Roy Thomas broke into the comics business in 1965, a bright-eyed young man from Missouri who would come to personally represent the inevitable promise of the medium finally made manifest: the fan that was raised on the stories was now creating them. Along with fellow fan Jerry Bails, Roy developed the first known organized comic fandom in the pages of *Alter Ego,* their self-published fanzine that connected together longtime and avid readers of comic books.

Leaving a teaching job, Roy took his deep knowledge of comics characters and their history and moved to New York City, taking advantage of an opportunity to work at DC Comics. His stay lasted little over a week, and he moved quickly across town to Marvel, where his career in comics started in earnest. As staff writer under Stan Lee, his duties quickly matured from proofreading and spot writing to more serious work as an assistant editor, where his acumen at remembering the minutiae of Marvel history came in handy for his forgetful boss.

Titles as disparate as *Modeling With Millie, Kid Colt,* and *Sgt. Fury* were written under his auspices, but his burning desire to write his own super-hero comics was held at bay. Eventually, he was able to write a few super-hero stories as fill-ins for Stan Lee: "My Life For Yours!," the Iron Man feature in *Tales of Suspense* #73, and a pair of Dr. Strange stories for *Strange Tales.*

Stan must have liked what he was reading, because after this seeming trial period, Roy "The Boy" (as he was called around the Bullpen) was given his own books for keeps. Roy closed out 1966 holding the reins to both *Sgt. Fury* and *The X-Men.* The latter book was a big deal for him personally, as his true love in writing was not *just* super-hero books, but super-hero *team* books! Along with artist Werner Roth, Roy carried the book through its post-Lee/Kirby tenure, creating characters along the way like Banshee, Sunfire, and Havok, culminating in his watershed collaboration with Neal Adams.

Proving his mettle on *X-Men* led him to *The Avengers,* and it was with this team that Roy really started crafting his legacy. In the pages of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, Roy introduced the Vision, drafted the Black Panther into membership, and wrote the "Kree/Skrull War." All in all, Roy logged serious time as writer of *Doctor Strange, Sub-Mariner, The Incredible Hulk, Captain Marvel* and more before the '60s concluded.

As he marched into the '70s, Roy's influence at Marvel widened even further to include the first adaptation of Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian,* a reinvention of Adam Warlock, and new super-team, The Defenders. By 1972 Roy was selected to succeed Stan Lee as Editor-In-Chief after the maestro of Marvel moved on to duties as Publisher. His tenure as EIC lasted for over two years before he returned to his writer/editor role, creating *Savage Sword of Conan, What If...?,* and the WWII heroes, the Invaders.

In 1980, he left the House of Ideas for DC Comics to pursue a lifelong dream by reviving the Justice Society of America in the pages of *All-Star Squadron.* He wrote many more comics for DC and Marvel over the next two decades and is still active today, writing comics, historical studies, adaptations of classic novels, and publishing a new version of *Alter Ego.* He lives in South Carolina with his wife and collaborator, Dann, and an amazing menagerie of animals that must make the neighbors nervous!

GERRY CONWAY

In 1969, sixteen-year-old Gerry Conway was a teenager peddling short stories to DC and Marvel for their horror anthology books, and by 1976, Conway had worked his way up to the position of Marvel's Editor-in-Chief. In between, he logged a mindbogglingly prolific schedule as writer for both companies; for purposes of brevity, it might be easier to list the titles he did not write!

After establishing a pedigree with those *House of Secrets* and *Tower of Shadows* short stories, Gerry quickly latched on to a regular gig as writer of *Daredevil, Sub-Mariner, Iron Man,* and both entries in the *Amazing Adventures* anthology (Black Widow and the Inhumans.) He also began long associations with *Amazing Spider-Man* and *Thor,* picking up with the flagship Spider-Man title after Roy Thomas had left to begin his own stint as Marvel EIC, and taking the baton on *Thor* from none other than Stan Lee. He scripted both books for nearly fifty issues each, and in the process wrote some memorable tales, including one of the all-time classic Spider-Man stories, "The Death of Gwen Stacy." Cueing off of his early interest in horror stories, Gerry took advantage of Marvel's burgeoning line of horror comics, co-creating *Werewolf By Night* and *Man-Thing,* as well as writing the first issue of the long-running *Tomb of Dracula.*

In 1976, he was handed the top job at Marvel, which he held for much of the year before transitioning to DC Comics. One of his first big assignments was writing the script for one of the first inter-company crossovers, *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man.* Shortly thereafter, he began a long tenure on prime DC titles like *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes, World's Finest* and *Wonder Woman.* He also co-created Firestorm with Al Milgrom in 1978, scribing all five issues of the short-lived '70s incarnation.

As the '80s dawned, he started a long run writing both key Batman titles, *Detective Comics* and *Batman,* and continued his long-term run on *Justice League of America,* a stint that began in earnest in 1978 and would end with the dismantling of the fabled JLA Detroit in 1986. During this era, he also revived Firestorm with artist Pat Broderick; this time the title found traction and Conway wrote the first 53 issues consecutively. A return to Marvel in the late '80s saw Conway tackling two of the three extant Spider-Man titles: *Spectacular Spider-Man* and *Web of Spider-Man.*

During this period of time, Conway was slowly asserting himself as a writer in film and television. His early '80s screenplay collaborations with Roy Thomas resulted in the animated film *Fire and Ice* and barbarian sequel *Conan the Destroyer.* By the late '80s, his opportunities in television writing had exploded, and he left comics to pursue his new vocation, writing for shows like *Matlock, Father Dowling Mysteries, Diagnosis: Murder* and *Law & Order.* His last work in comics was in 1993, writing the Topps Kirbyverse one-shot *Night Glider.*

Currently, Conway is still active in writing and producing for television, and resides in California with his wife and their child.

JOHN BUSCEMA

Though known primarily for his long tenure as one of Marvel Comics' most prolific pencilers, John Buscema began his celebrated career at the age of twenty-one with Timely Comics. After Timely closed up its in-house bullpen and sent most freelancers chasing down new art assignments, John pursued comics work for a time before he bagged the comics scene altogether and went to work in advertising in 1958.

When he finally returned to comics, however, he did so with a vengeance. Stan Lee recruited him away from the field of advertising and quickly ensconced him into the upper ranks of Marvel artists. Picking up where *Avengers* mainstay Don Heck left off, "Big John" settled into a long run of his own, showcasing the exploits of Earth's Mightiest Heroes. The much-anticipated *Silver Surfer* series was launched with John at the helm, and top-shelf books like *Fantastic Four* and *Thor* were entrusted to his care after Jack Kirby left Marvel for DC Comics.

John's bold, muscular artwork commanded the comic book page with realistic figurework that represented the next evolutionary step in post-Kirby Marvel Comics style. The respect accorded him within Marvel as an artist's artist was of such renown that he literally wrote the book on it, composing *How To Draw the Marvel Way*, the classic "how to" book in comic-book illustration.

He worked from the '70s through the '90s on nearly every title in the Marvel stable, including his personal favorite title *Conan the Barbarian* with Roy Thomas, providing steady work throughout his career. He retired from regular work in 1996, but returned every now and then to the comics scene until he passed away after a battle with cancer in 2002.

ROSS ANDRU

An everyman and entrepreneur throughout his long career in comics, Ross Andru became a stalwart penciler on Marvel's *Amazing Spider-Man* during the '70s, gaining a renown as one of the great Spidey pencilers that has grown steadily over the years. With a smooth, compact style that eschewed extraneous detail, Ross Andru's artistic visions were grounded in a reality that engaged the maturing medium's readers.

His career in comics began in 1951. With an education at the Cartoonists and Illustrators School and a gig drawing Burne Hogarth's weekly *Tarzan* strips behind him, the Cleveland native teamed with inker Mike Esposito to form not only a decades-enduring artistic partnership but their own company, MR Publications.

Their next company, Mikeross Publications, turned out such fare as *Get Lost* and the romance title *Heart and Soul*. The success of these initiatives fleeting in the face of an industry-wide downturn, Andru would often find himself bouncing between Marvel and DC, always with Esposito at his side. At Marvel, he handled mainly Western comics like *Annie Oakley*, while at DC, he toiled on Robert Kanigher's war comics like *Star-Spangled War Stories* and *Our Army At War*, wherein he drew the very first appearance of the fabled war hero Sgt. Rock of Easy Company in 1959.

His impressive performance with Esposito garnered him a chance to take over another of Kanigher's titles, *Wonder Woman*, starting a nine-year long run that would stretch through 1967 and find him telling charming stories of a mythological bent featuring Diana Prince's teenage years on Paradise Island. Another notable title that Andru would work on in the '60s was, *Metal Men*. Leaping from *Showcase* to its own bi-monthly title, Andru and Esposito co-created the sweet-natured heroic fantasy that featured artificially intelligent robots that reflected particular precious metals.

A move to Marvel in the early '70s resulted in key work on *Marvel Feature,* where he drew the first adventures of The Defenders, and *Marvel Team-Up*, his first regular foray into Spider-Man.

Over the next five years, Andru would team with writer Gerry Conway and produce milestones as the first appearance of the Punisher, Harry Osborn donning the guise of the Green Goblin and the infamous Spider-Mobile. Completely at home in the cityscapes that Spider-Man called home, Andru's approach kept Spider-Man at the top of the sales charts through the decade. He also drew the first Marvel/DC super-hero crossover with *Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man*.

As the '80s dawned, Andru returned to DC in an editorial capacity, with his art focused mainly on covers. But as the decade carried on, his pencils would grace the interiors of books like *Atari Force, Jonah Hex, Vigilante*, and *Blue Beetle*.

Andru passed away in 1993.

RAMONA FRADON

One of the comics industry's pioneering women artists, Ramona Fradon burnished a legacy as one of the greatest Aquaman artists of all time during the characters' 1950s and '60s heyday. As a fresh graduate of the Parsons School of Design in Greenwich Village, a letterer friend at DC asked to show Ramona's samples, which lead to her first assignment drawing Shining Knight in the pages of *Adventure Comics*. It wasn't long, however, before she transitioned to another feature in that super hero anthology. Starting in August 1951's *Adventure Comics* #167, she rendered the adventures of Aquaman, his pet Octopus, Topo, and Aqualad—the hero's boy sidekick, a character introduced by Fradon—with a fun, carefree style that evoked Milton Caniff. She would remain Aquaman's sole artist for the next ten years until she left full-time freelance work to focus on raising her firstborn daughter, Amy. During this period, she did make time to draw the first four issues of *Metamorpho*. In 1973, Roy Thomas persuaded her back to comics to draw an issue of *Fantastic Four*, but she was soon back at DC illustrating *Plastic Man, Freedom Fighters* and *Super Friends*. In 1980, Fradon followed up founding cartoonist Dale Messick for a 15-year run on the *Brenda Starr* syndicated strip. Ramona was inducted into the Comic Book Hall of Fame in 2006, and is delighted to meet fans old and new at comic book conventions around the country.

Biographical material researched and written by John Rhett Thomas

THE MARVEL MASTERWORKS LIBRARY

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN VOLS. 1-13
ANT-MAN/GIANT-MAN VOLS. 1-2
THE AVENGERS VOLS. 1-11
THE BLACK PANTHER VOL. 1
CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-5
CAPTAIN MARVEL VOLS. 1-3
DAREDEVIL VOLS. 1-6
DEATHLOK VOL. 1
THE DEFENDERS VOLS. 1-2
DOCTOR STRANGE VOLS. 1-5
THE FANTASTIC FOUR VOLS. 1-13
THE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-2
THE INCREDIBLE HULK VOLS. 1-6
THE INHUMANS VOLS. 1-2
THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN VOLS. 1-7
IRON FIST VOL. 1
MARVEL TEAM-UP VOL. 1
NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D. VOLS. 1-2
RAWHIDE KID VOLS. 1-2
SGT. FURY VOLS. 1-3
THE SILVER SURFER VOLS. 1-2
THE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-4
THE MIGHTY THOR VOLS. 1-10
WARLOCK VOLS. 1-2
THE X-MEN VOLS. 1-8
THE UNCANNY X-MEN VOLS. 1-7

THE GOLDEN AGE

As the Great Depression wore on and the specter of war hung over the heads of all Americans, a new entertaining escape from the newspapers' horrifying realities was born: the comic book. Within their four-color pages, larger-than-life super heroes could make short work of America's foes, giving readers of all ages hope for victory against the real-life enemies that faced the United States.

At the forefront of this new medium was Timely Comics, a young company staffed by such legendary talents as Carl Burgos, Bill Everett, Joe Simon, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee. These skilled writers and artists created a vast array of characters that would give rise to the Marvel Universe!

GOLDEN AGE ALL-WINNERS VOLS. 1-4
GOLDEN AGE CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-5
GOLDEN AGE DARING MYSTERY VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE MARVEL COMICS VOLS. 1-6
GOLDEN AGE MYSTIC COMICS VOL. 1
GOLDEN AGE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE U.S.A. COMICS VOL. 1
GOLDEN AGE YOUNG ALLIES VOL. 1

THE ATLAS ERA

Seeing super heroes waning, Timely Comics evolved into Atlas Comics and took on a vast new range of genres: science-fiction tales of outer space adventures and unimaginable monsters; realistic war comics; buxom jungle heroines; horror comics that would become the center of a moral panic that rocked the industry; and romance comics for the emerging teen audience. Even the classic costumed heroes of the '40s retooled to take on the threat of Communism. From Western gunfighters to crime to horror, Atlas had it all!

ATLAS ERA BATTLEFIELD VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA BLACK KNIGHT/YELLOW CLAW VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA HEROES VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA JUNGLE ADVENTURE VOLS. 1-2
ATLAS ERA MENACE VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA STRANGE TALES VOLS. 1-5
ATLAS ERA TALES TO ASTONISH VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA TALES OF SUSPENSE VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA VENUS VOL. 1

THE MARVEL AGE

It was August 1961 and change was hitting the newsstands. *Fantastic Four* #1 did not feature the squeaky-clean heroes of yesteryear. These were real characters placed in extraordinary circumstances. They lived together, they fought among themselves—and sometimes, they even lost to the bad guys. This was more than a change in attitude: It was the beginning of something entirely different—the Marvel Age of Comics!

Thanks to the fertile imaginations of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and others, an unending list of heroes followed the FF with ever-increasing acclaim and popularity: the Amazing Spider-Man, the Mighty Thor, the Incredible Hulk, Daredevil, Iron Man and the X-Men, to name but a few. These were the Marvel heroes, born of conflict and a continuous struggle to balance human lives with superhuman responsibilities.

The *Marvel Masterworks* series was created to give comic-book readers everywhere the chance to experience the greatest comics the world has known as they were originally presented.

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
20¢ 129 DEC 02462
THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIX MAGAZINE!
FANTASTIC FOUR
EXTRA!! THE HUMAN TORCH QUITS THE F.F.!
STAND AWAY! MEDUSA CLAIMS BEN GRIMM!
NO! HE BELONGS TO THUNDRA...
--OR TO NO ONE!!
ALL THIS, AND THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR, TOO!

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
20¢ 131 FEB 02462
THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
FANTASTIC FOUR
THE HUMAN TORCH GOES WILD... IN THE LAND OF THE UNCANNY INHUMANS!
FEATURING THE MUTANT CALLED QUICKSILVER! PLUS THE MOST SHOCKING SURPRISE OF ALL!

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
20¢ 132 MAR 02462
THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
FANTASTIC FOUR
FIGHT ME! RESIST ME! YOU'LL BUT MAKE ME STRONGER-- EVER STRONGER!
--UNTIL AT LAST DESTROY YOU!!
OMEGA! THE ULTIMATE ASSASSIN!

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
20¢ 137 AUG 02462
THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
FANTASTIC FOUR
REED! BEN'S DOWN-- AND NOW THAT CREEP'S GOT MEDUSA!
DON'T GIVE UP, TORCH-- NO MATTER WHAT! IF WE FALL-- THE WORLD IS FINISHED!
WHERE WALKS WAR-HEAD!

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
20¢ 139 OCT 02462
THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
FANTASTIC FOUR
TARGET: TOMORROW!
DULL-WITTED MONSTROSITY! YOU'RE NO MATCH FOR THE NEW MIRACLE MAN!
WE'LL--; LYKKHAN!; SEE ABOUT THAT, PAL--
--'CAUSE WHEN I GET UP... IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
20¢ 140 NOV 02462
THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
FANTASTIC FOUR
I'VE SMASHED THE THING--
I'VE CRUSHED THE HUMAN TORCH--
I'VE BLASTED MEDUSA AND MR. FANTASTIC--
AND NOW... ANNIHILUS RULES TWO WORLDS!
GUESS AGAIN, DINGBAT-- 'CAUSE THE IRR DON'T GIVE UP-- TILL WE'RE DEAD!!
AW RATS! AIN'T DEAD YET!

FANTASTIC FOUR
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
20¢ 141 DEC 02462
THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
FANTASTIC FOUR
IT'S TOO LATE, BEN-- TOO LATE FOR ALL OF US!!
LITTLE FRANKLIN IS GLOWING-- LIKE AN ATOMIC BOMB!
BEN-- STOP! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!
ALL I KNOW, RICHARDS, IS THAT YOU TRIED TO KILL YOUR OWN SON!!
IS THIS THE END OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR?

PRINTED IN CHINA

MARVEL